

**THE LITERACY ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT
OF VOLUNTARY READING:
A CASE STUDY IN GAUTENG EAST AND THE
HIGHVELD RIDGE AREA**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that “The literacy environment in support of voluntary reading: A case study in Gauteng East and the Highveld Ridge area” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

(Mrs L. Tiemensma)

3185184

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who always inspired me and believed in me – my mother Elza de Wet and my late father Chris de Wet.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between the literacy environment at home, at school and in the community and the development of voluntary reading and thus a reading habit.

This research is relevant as there is an alarming drop out rate, poor matriculation results and low scores in reading performance tests in South African schools. Many factors and possible causes can contribute to this, but a major problem is the lack of a reading habit, low literacy levels and an environment that is not supportive of literacy. As a result, many children are still leaving school functionally illiterate.

In order to develop a reading habit, learners must get maximum support and encouragement from their literacy environment, as children learn from what is going on around them. The major role players in the learner's literacy environment, are the home and family (microstructure), the school and teachers, and his community which includes libraries (macrostructure).

A literature study on the foundations, contexts and practices of literacy, voluntary reading and environmental factors that affect reading provides the theoretical basis and a conceptual framework for this study. The research method used is a case study with the focus on a sample of learners from Grade 3 - 7 from schools in the Highveld Ridge and Gauteng East area. Due to budgetary and logistical constraints, rural areas are not included. The empirical survey investigates various aspects of the literacy environment. The survey method, with questionnaires for learners, teachers and headmasters, was used. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to generate data.

The findings are that many learners experience difficulties which hinder the development of a reading habit, for example: schools and communities do not have libraries, or access to them is limited; appropriate reading materials are not available; or learners do not have access to them; multilingualism is a major problem in a country with eleven official languages, as many learners have to learn and teachers

have to teach in a language other than their mother tongue; parents are not literate and cannot help their children; socio-economic conditions are not conducive to reading; there is a lack of support from governmental at various levels.

Although findings in a case study cannot be generalised, certain conclusions and suggestions can guide teachers, parents and librarians to create a more supportive literacy environment to encourage voluntary reading.

KEYWORDS

Literacy

Reading – Parental participation

Voluntary reading

Reading promotion

Libraries and readers

School libraries

Note: The masculine form – he, his, him – will be used for reasons of economy and reading ease but it encompasses both male and female.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Reading is an essential competency in the 21st century in order to survive in the global economy. Global change and the needs of globalisation, international markets and the information age, require high level literacy skills. The rationale for many literacy and other educational policies is to equip learners to meet the changing literacy demands of the workforce and the broader society (Cruickshank 2006: 52).

In almost all countries throughout the world, there is concern about literacy. The period from 2003 - 2013 has been proclaimed as the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNESCO 2005: 31). In countries where large sections of the population are illiterate, literacy is seen as essential for reaching political, economic and health goals. In information societies, where there has been compulsory schooling for generations, there is concern about the persistence of a minority of illiterate adults and complaints about the low levels of literacy skills in the work force. Reports on various literacy research projects emphasise this (for example, Aitchison, *et al* 2005). The problem of illiteracy in South Africa (and the entire African continent) is one of the chief concerns that lead to the Millennium African Renaissance Plan.

South Africa has a high level of adult illiteracy and low level functional literacy. Taking into account the 1996 General Population Census and the 1995 October Household Survey, Aitchison and Harley (2006: 90) stated that of the 26 million adults (people aged 15 and over) in South Africa, about 12 to 13 million (50%) of them had less than a full (Grade 9) general education, about 7,4 to 8,5 million had less than Grade 7 (often used as a minimum education level indicator of sustainable functional literacy), and about 2,9 to 4,2 million people had no schooling at all (thus illiterate).

The most frequent response indicated by those that are illiterate, is a lack of opportunity to read when growing up. This response was given predominantly in rural areas (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007). The high level of illiteracy in South Africa plays an important role in the social context of literacy, because, if learners grow up in an illiterate environment, this affects their exposure to books and literate behaviour (Machet 2000a: 4).

In South Africa there is a lack of a general reading culture. The majority of the population can be classified as infrequent readers (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007). Numerous newspaper articles, reports and studies, such as Pacheco (1996), Blauw (1998), ERA working conference on reading (2000), Pretorius (2002), Land (2003), and Sisulu (2004), indicate that the majority of South Africans do not have a culture of reading. The National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans found that only one in 10 respondents named reading as their “most often” activity during leisure time, and these are disproportionately white and coloured females and those with higher education (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007). Many learners in South Africa come from a largely oral culture. They are seldom exposed to storybook reading and have little emergent literacy experience before they start school. When they start their schooling, they start to read in their primary language, but once they can decode the words, very little sustained effort goes into helping them make the transition from decoding to reading with comprehension (Pretorius 2002: 190). A reading culture is an important environmental factor that encourages learners to become voluntary readers. Another negative factor is that children are not always taught in their primary language. Some schools go for English from Grade 1 and sometimes there are not sufficient numbers of learners who speak a primary language to enable the school to teach them in this language (for example a Zulu speaker in a Venda area).

Apartheid affected education in South Africa negatively. The Black Education Department had inadequate funding, under-trained teachers, poor facilities and a high dropout rate. There was also no compulsory education for Africans (Sedibe 1998). South Africa has made progress since the new democracy in 1994. New legislation in

South Africa has brought changes to education. The Schools Act, in effect from January 1997, has made schooling compulsory for all children between the ages of six and fifteen (Andersen 2002).

New opportunities in education are now being offered to millions of South African learners, but numerous reading tests indicate that South African children are not reading at the appropriate grade level. Literacy achievement is good measure of how well an education system is performing. South African learners perform very badly in international tests of numeracy and literacy. Grade 4 pupils in South Africa have amongst the worst numeracy and literacy skills in Africa, according to a comparative study done by the Department of Education and the Unesco-Unicef Monitoring Learning Achievement Project which examined 12 countries in Africa (Pretorius 2000). More than 10 000 Grade 4 learners participated in this study. According to the latest PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) research results (Mullis, *et al* 2007), 78% of South African children have not developed the basic reading skills required for learning by the time they reach Grade 5 (the international standard is 6%), and only 2% measure up to the highest international standards of literacy. PIRLS is one of the largest reading literacy assessments in the world and 40 countries participated in this latest study. Approximately 30 000 Grade 4 learners in more than 400 South African schools across the country participated in this study.

Results like these are an indication that South African learners do not have a solid foundation in literacy. Learners learn basic reading in school but many cannot read with understanding.

The impression exists that many learners associate reading and books only with study and examinations (Machet 2000a: 8). Many people in South Africa did not grow up with books and reading, and have not acquired the reading habit, nor are they aware of the importance of reading and the role it can play in their lives. They see reading as something separate from real life, something to be learned at school and then used only if it cannot be avoided.

Literacy and learning go hand in hand. If learners can read and write effectively, they are more likely to be successful learners (Machet & Pretorius 2003: 7; Pretorius 2002: 187). Research by Pretorius (2002) found that the lack of reading ability is a barrier to effective academic performance. Literacy is essential for children in senior primary and secondary school levels. In the beginning they learn to read, but at higher levels they read to learn.

Teachers, librarians, parents and caregivers face an enormous challenge in trying to create a reading habit. According to the official 2006 matriculation results released by the Department of Education, 33,4% of the students who wrote the exam did not pass. Over the past five years (2003 - 2007), the pass rate dropped each year (2003 – 73,3%, 2004 – 70,7%, 2005 – 68,3%, 2006 – 66,6%, 2007 – 65,2%), and the national average for matriculation endorsements in 2006 was at a mere 16,2%. (Williams 2007: 8). The National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) held a seminar on the state of education in South Africa in 2001 and highlighted the problem of an extremely high repeater rate (NEDLAC 2001). These poor matriculation results, and the high failure rate among learners, need to be addressed.

The literacy problem impacts on libraries because their existence and future depends on a literate population. Libraries – particularly public and school libraries – as institutions, exist because people can read and write. Literacy is dependent on the availability of materials, and this is where libraries play a significant role to support the development of a reading habit. Provision of reading matter, both for recreational and educational purposes, and provision of information, are the pillars of public and school libraries. Libraries – both the school and public or community library – can play an important role in fostering a love for reading. Two of the key missions stated in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (UNESCO 2000), are:

- Creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age;
- Supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.

The library "must have full partnership in the Learning Society that will have to be brought to life if we are to be competent, knowledge citizens in the Information Age" (Salter & Salter 1991: 51).

Budget cuts in libraries in South Africa and the closure of libraries in recent years indicate that government does not recognise the importance of libraries in supporting the development of a reading culture (To read or not to read? ... 2005). According to the National Assessment Report (Public Ordinary Schools) (South Africa. Department of Education 2007: 39), only 7,2 % of South African schools now have functional school libraries. Libraries can play a central role in the development of a reading culture by providing access to reading materials, and encouraging and promoting reading activities. One of the main aims of public and school libraries is the promotion of reading for educational purposes and for pleasure. It is therefore essential that librarians support the development of a reading habit, especially if they want to thrive in the new South Africa.

The concern about the issue of children's reading is evidenced by the number of conferences and seminars held on this topic - for example the Book Mokete (Bloemfontein, September 1998), the All Africa Conference on Children's reading (Pretoria, August 1999), Children's reading (University of the Western Cape, July 1999), ERA working conference on reading (Rosebank, 2000), International Literacy Conference, Cape Town (2001), The Culture of reading and the book chain: How do we achieve a quantum leap? (Centre for the Book, 2004), LIASA's special meeting on "To read or not to read" (2005) and the IFLA/ALP Reading Promotion in Africa Workshop, Windhoek, (2007). This is an indication of its relevance and concern.

One of the first goals in literacy development should be the nurturing of positive attitudes toward reading. A positive attitude toward reading is an important factor in the development of a reading habit. Favourable attitudes towards reading need to be inculcated in the individual at a young age. Research since the 1970s, has provided strong evidence that literacy skills start developing in the pre-school years. The younger children are when introduced to books and reading, the more likely they are

to develop a reading habit (Elkin & Lonsdale 1996; Elley 2001; Heath 1983; Machet & Olën 1997; Machet & Pretorius 2003: 7; Snow, *et al* 1991; Weinberger 1996). During the International Literacy Year in 1990, consensus was obtained about the difficulty of reaching high and perdurable levels of adult literacy without paying enough attention to what happens with children before the age of 15 (Ferreiro 1994: 223).

From the above, it is clear that there are numerous role players in supporting a learner in developing literacy and a reading habit. Children learn from what is going on around them. Vygotsky's theory of child development claims that the origin of knowledge lies in the interaction of the child with his environment (Sigelman & Rider 2006: 192-193). The social environment of the child – the home, school and community – is a determining factor in the child's cognitive and social development. How well, and to what extent a learner reads depends upon the interaction between personal and environmental conditions. A learner's literacy experience is not bound by school and therefore inputs and support from the entire literacy environment are necessary if the reading habit, and ultimately a reading culture, is to be developed in South Africa.

Evidence for the value of free voluntary reading continues to accumulate. In the last few decades, studies show that those who do more recreational reading show better development in reading (Krashen 2004a). Voluntary reading is thus a sure way to advance literacy skills in children.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As has been indicated above, the lack of a reading habit, and low literacy levels, is a problem in South Africa. In order to achieve high literacy levels, a child needs a social environment that supports the acquisition and retention of literacy. One of the contributory factors for low literacy levels may be the lack of a supportive literacy environment in home, school and in the community. In South Africa this supporting environment appears to be lacking in many respects.

By investigating the inputs from the environment to encourage and support reading, it may be possible to determine to what extent the environment at home, at school and in the community supports voluntary reading.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question addressed in this study is:

Does the literacy environment at home, in school and in the community support the development of literacy and voluntary reading among young learners?

The sub-problems, that can be identified from the research question, are:

- What factors in the environment support literacy and voluntary reading?
- To what extent is voluntary reading present in the sample group?
- What kind of literacy environment does the home provide?
- What kind of literacy environment do the schools provide?
- To what extent do learners have access to libraries?
- To what extent do they make use of libraries?
- Do they have access to reading materials?

The primary focus of this study is to investigate the role of the literacy environment in the development, promotion and encouragement of voluntary reading and to identify and investigate factors amenable to intervention.

1.4 IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The above-mentioned facts about learners' reading in South Africa point to a dire need for all concerned to examine what learners need in the environment to develop a love of reading so that they will read voluntarily and, in this way, strengthen their literacy skills.

Research on human social behaviour and attitudes is conducted for many reasons, including to explore, describe, explain, and evaluate for the purpose of understanding an issue in depth, arriving at decisions, and making predictions (Nardi 2003: 9). The purpose of this research project is, in the first place, to be descriptive – to provide basic information describing the topic (for example literacy, voluntary reading and the literacy environment) and respondents (characteristics of the learners) involved. Once one has some descriptive information, the reasons why and how some social phenomena occur among respondents can be investigated. Specific outcomes are then evaluated to provide the explanations for why and how a particular result occurred and then one can focus on solving problems. With information collected systematically, those responsible for a programme or policy can make informed decisions about what dimensions need to be changed, enhanced, or removed (Nardi 2003: 11). By figuring out the causes of behaviour, one can use this information to make informed decisions about future events.

Traditionally the field of literacy research has been seen as fragmented, concentrating only on a certain aspect of literacy. Various researchers have investigated the role of teachers and the school in the development of a reading culture – for example, Masitsa (1995) and Pacheco (1996) – and research has been carried out on the home environment – for example, Heath (1983), Hicks (2002) and Taylor (1983) – as well as libraries (Morrow & Weinstein 1986). It has become more and more accepted that many different factors influence reading success or failure and these ought to be studied together. A study by Volk and de Acosta (2001: 216) on literacy practices of Puerto Rican children concluded that much more than parent-child interaction is needed for literacy development – namely “the complexity and richness’ of wider support networks and literacy practices occurring within the everyday lives of these children”.

Cruickshank (2006) researched the cross-disciplinary nature of literacy in Australia and came to the conclusion that this diversity is a strength in literacy development. The study of literacy includes a range of disciplines such as education, sociology, linguistics, psychology and information science.

This study will examine the home, school and community literacy environment, with special focus on the South Africa. The entire literacy environment, not just one factor on its own will be investigated. The influence that factors may have on each other, as well as how they can complement one another, will be investigated.

It is important for librarians and information workers to understand the literacy environment as it gives librarians in school and community libraries insight into the needs and literacy environment of children. This will assist libraries in offering appropriate services for literacy development. The model of the public library used predominantly in South Africa, is one developed in western countries. It may need to be adapted to be more relevant to children's needs in the new South Africa.

According to Moahi (2002: 237) researchers need to ask the following: Do we have the knowledge and information required to make a difference in society; how can we best ensure that we manage our knowledge and information to facilitate the right decision making, choices and policies for development? Research in information science must contribute to human development, which the United Nations Development Programme defines as "the process of enlarging people's choices" (Moahi 2002: 238). This means increasing opportunities that people have in their lives in areas such as education, health, access to economic opportunities and politics. To have access to these options and choices often requires literacy and therefore literacy practices play a very important role in all these areas. Research on literacy development is a highly relevant issue because, without high levels of literacy, our learners will not be equipped to participate in a global economy.

Reading is a topic of interest for many stakeholders, for example the government and public sector (various departments, like the Department of Education, academic institutions, libraries), the commercial field (publishers, printers, authors, book sellers), and civil society (the society at large, book buyers, library users, employers) (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007). Findings and suggestions could be communicated to the schools, libraries, parent, the Department of Education, and others. Recommendations can be made to all those concerned and interested in the improvement of the problematic situation.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. In this case study, the survey method is used as research design. Technically, a survey is a series of questions asked of a number of people. Surveys are appropriate for discovering basic demographic information and it allows researchers to obtain information about things that cannot be observed directly, such as attitudes (McIntyre 2005: 120).

The empirical survey is mainly quantitative research but qualitative research is also used. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative – non-numerical and numerical – methods will be used. The qualitative research will be by means of open-ended questions. This research is cross-sectional, as it observes the situation at one point in time. Various variables and relationships among variables will be investigated, using questionnaires. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.6.

The research methodology will be dichotomous, consisting of a literature study as well as a case study. A case study is not a representative sample. The units of analysis will be learners from Grade 3 to Grade 5, a group of teachers of these grades and a group of headmasters in township and urban areas. The results will refer to these specific areas.

1.5.1 Literature survey

Current research reported in the literature, on various aspects of literacy environment, will be critically evaluated to provide a theoretical basis and a conceptual framework for the research.

Aspects that will be examined in the literature survey are literacy, voluntary reading, reading culture and the literacy environment in order to get a detailed picture of these phenomena. Causes and reasons will be investigated. The study must provide evidence to support or refute explanations or predictions. Answers to questions will be sought. The literature survey will also provide the theoretical support for the

empirical research and assist the researcher to identify important aspects that need to be investigated by means of the survey.

1.5.2 Empirical research

The survey instrument to measure variables is questionnaires. The purpose of the questionnaires is to find out if there is a connection between certain environmental factors and a reading culture. Questionnaires, comprising open-ended and closed questions, are used for collecting data. Most of the questions are multiple-choice closed questions.

The questionnaires were tested in a pilot study and changes made where problems were encountered.

The three main focus areas of the research are:

- Literacy environment at home;
- Literacy environment at school in the middle primary school years;
- Community environment including public or community libraries and bookshops.

The learners' involvement in literacy activities in these areas is investigated.

Three separate questionnaires are compiled and served as an instrument to collect data:

- Learners' questionnaire (Grade 3 - 5 Learners) (Appendix A)
- Teachers' questionnaire (Grade 3 - 5 Teachers) (Appendix B)
- Headmasters' questionnaire (Primary school headmasters) (Appendix C)

The main components of the questionnaires are:

- Demographics – who the respondents are. Critical to understanding human behaviour is knowing how behaviour and opinions vary across different categories of people;
- Behaviours – what the respondents actually do with regards to reading;
- Attitudes – the respondents' feelings and opinions about reading.

Each of these areas generates a list of specific variables related to the topics in the research questions.

The overall objectives for the questionnaires were then to obtain data on:

- Demographics/background of the children and teachers – for example, their age, gender, population group and home language, teachers' training and experience;
- Home environment and literacy practices at home – for example, whether the children's home environment includes electricity, radio, television, computers, home literacy, stories, books and other types of reading material;
- School environment and literacy practices at school – for example, stories and reading in class, classroom collections, reading corners and reading preferences;
- Libraries as literacy environment – for example, library membership and use.

Learners from Grades 3 - 7 were chosen because they should have mastered basic literacy skills by that point, and their answers can indicate if they are *en route* to developing a reading habit and if they get support for this from their literacy environment. A person's successful mastery of reading depends largely on their experiences with literature and reading that take place during the early years in school.

The geographical area investigated is limited to Mpumalanga and Gauteng for logistical reasons. Twenty-two schools in the Highveld Ridge area (Mpumalanga) and in the East Gauteng area were selected for the purpose of the case study. Participants were chosen from both private and public schools situated in township and urban areas. Schools from different socio-economic environments in Mpumalanga and East Gauteng were also used.

By focusing on this target group, the researcher intends to obtain findings that could provide insight into the support that learners get from their literacy environments for reading for pleasure.

Permission to conduct this study was sought and granted from the regional office of each relevant Education Department. Twenty-two schools/principals, 50 teachers and 170 learners were included in this study.

The researcher visited the schools and met the headmasters to explain and discuss their participation. Names of grades 3, 4, and 5 teachers were obtained and three learners from each class were selected.

The teachers and headmasters of the schools filled in their questionnaires in their own time. The questionnaires for learners were done as structured interviews with each learner from the target group – an interviewer asked the questions and put a cross in the block indicating the child's choice.

Ethical considerations were taken into account. This will be discussed in more details in 5.4.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the role of the literacy environment in promoting voluntary reading. This is a broad topic to research. To make it more manageable, only those factors which are fundamentally connected to the matter are investigated.

“Support” and “voluntary reading” can not be quantitatively measured, but indications of their presence will be looked at – for example, if parents and teachers read to learners, and if learners enjoy reading and read for pleasure.

This is a case study where the focus is on a group of learners in urban and suburban areas. Rural areas are not included because of budgetary and logistical constraints. Rural areas may have different results. According to Cynthia Hugo, national director of READ, suburban learner's performance at school can be on average as much as five years ahead of rural schools on remote farms (Readathon aims to bridge...2002). Learners in urban and suburban areas are more likely to have access to books and trained teachers. Both in the 2001 and 2006 PIRLS, average reading achievement

across countries was highest among learners attending urban schools, next highest among those attending suburban schools (Mullis, *et al* 2007: 246).

The results in a case study cannot be generalised. Lack of generalisation of results is thus another limitation. The limitation of attention to a particular instance of something is the essential characteristic of the case study.

1.7 RESEARCH OUTLINE

This thesis consists of seven chapters.

Chapter 1 is an introductory orientation to the research. This comprises the background to the problem, the statement of the problem, research question, importance and purpose of the study, the research design and research methods and limitations of the study.

Chapters 2 - 4 constitute the literature survey.

In Chapter 2 various aspects of literacy will be investigated, such as defining literacy, literacy practices and modern society, levels of literacy, the cultural and social foundation of literacy, mastering literacy skills, language and literacy, and literacy in South Africa.

Chapter 3 investigates the concept of voluntary reading, and the important role of attitude and motivation in reading voluntarily.

Chapter 4 deals with the literacy environment as a whole and includes environmental determinants such as the home literacy environment, school literacy environment, as well as libraries and the community/society, and how these environmental determinants offer support to voluntary reading habits.

In Chapter 5, the research methodology used in the empirical research is discussed. The research methods, population sample and data collection are described.

In Chapter 6, the findings are given.

In Chapter 7, the findings are discussed and analysed and concluding remarks and recommendations made.

1.8 CONCLUSION

The lack of a reading habit among the majority of the population, as well as low literacy levels in South Africa, make research like this necessary in order to try and identify ways to improve the situation. Education in South Africa is not up to standard and many learners do not have access to libraries and reading materials. The intention is to identify key factors that influence voluntary reading and to investigate how these factors can be influenced so as to raise literacy levels and support engagement in voluntary reading.

In the next chapter various aspects of literacy will be investigated.

CHAPTER 2

LITERACY **Foundations, contexts and practices**

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is voluntary reading and the reading environment. However, voluntary reading cannot take place without a certain level of literacy. Literacy is therefore a prerequisite for engagement in voluntary reading and on the other hand voluntary reading can improve and develop literacy skills. Understanding literacy is thus relevant for this study.

In this chapter the focus is on defining literacy and aspects of literacy such as its foundations, mastering literacy, the role of language (especially reading in a second language), and the social and cultural contexts of literacy.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING LITERACY

What literacy is and what it means depends on particular contexts and on individual needs, and varies from culture to culture, from period to period, from society to society, from situation to situation, and change over time. Literacy is a complex concept and has many levels and various and variable dimensions. It is difficult to come up with a single definition for literacy. On the one hand, most would agree that the term refers to aspects of reading and writing, but on the other hand it is not always clear what specific abilities or knowledge counts as literacy.

2.2.1 Defining literacy

Fundamentally literacy is defined as the ability to read and write with a minimal level of proficiency (Reitz 2004: 422). This basic skill could be considered as a very first level of literacy. Basic literacy means an ability to read and understand words, sentences and texts.

The National Literacy Strategy in the United Kingdom defines literacy in the school context through an analysis of what literate learners should be able to do, and this includes the following (Wray, *et al* 2002: 2):

Literate children should:

- read and write with confidence, fluency and understanding;
- be interested in books, read with enjoyment and evaluate and justify their preferences;
- know and understand a range of genres (...);
- understand and be able to use a range of non-fiction texts;
- have an interest in words and word meanings, and a growing vocabulary.

These statements show that there are other dimensions of literacy in school than the basic skill “to read and write”.

Since World War II it is recognised that literacy has a functional dimension when it is applied in a wider context than the basic level. The term “functional literacy” was introduced in order to refer to the demands of literacy in the complex world (Verhoeven, Elbro & Reitsma 2002: 4). The National Literacy Act of 1991 in the United States defines literacy as: "an individual's ability to read, write ... and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (National Institute for Literacy 1991). According to Campbell, as quoted by Withrow (2004: 3), literacy is the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual.

UNESCO indicated that the knowledge and skills of reading and writing should equip a person to function effectively within his own group/culture and community, and that literate persons have the potential to control their lives and their environment through access to information, ideas and opinions (Elkin & Lonsdale 1996: 8), for example democracy requires a literate society to function effectively as people should be able to read a variety of sources to make choices. Meek (1991) also defines literacy as "being in control".

During the 1970s and 1980s a school of thought viewed literacy as a much broader set of print-related behaviours than those conventionally experienced in education, and research was focused more closely on the nature of literacy outside of schooling. Literacy had to be recognised as a much more complex activity involving cognitive and strategic behaviour. Meaning could no longer be seen as simply being in a text. The understanding of written language is a much more dynamic and interactive process. It is readers who assign meaning to print (Gillen & Hall 2003: 5-6). Readers make meaning of texts in a variety of ways, depending not only on the purpose for reading, but also on the difficulty of the text and the reader's prior knowledge (Kennedy 2007: 12).

The PIRLS (Kennedy & Sainsbury 2007: 11) definition of reading literacy focuses on the importance of the variety of contexts in which reading takes place:

For PIRLS, reading literacy is defined as the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment.

This definition includes reading for enjoyment.

Full participation in the information society requires advanced levels of literacy. New technology has led to increased levels of literacy being required and the ability to read texts in a variety of formats, for example internet and emails. The ability to read and write is associated with earning a living. Previously if you were a labourer or factory worker, you needed much lower levels of literacy to function in your world. Because of technology there are few jobs like that available today. Today's global economy requires a highly literate work force.

Definitions of literacy thus range from a minimal ability to read and write, to complex literacy skills required for a full participation in the processes of society. Current definitions and discussions of literacy indicate that literacy cannot be defined without taking into account an individual's social and cultural context. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script, but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use.

For the purpose of this thesis *literacy* is defined as the reading skills necessary for Grade 3 to Grade 5 learners to read at the appropriate grade level.

2.2.2 Literacy in the 21st century

Literacy in the 21st century is now far more important than it was in the past and is in itself more complex. In the 21st century a high level of literacy is required to function effectively in the world and children will need to be competent readers and writers if they are to be employable in the global economy.

The written word is prominent in communication today. We live “print-crammed” lives (Meek 1991: 2). In today's society different kinds of texts – for example books, newspapers, periodicals, emails, internet – are a source of information. The acquisition of literacy skills has been extended beyond books and other print media to include new technologies. Modern society is characterised by increasing developments in telecommunication and technology which require a high level of literacy. The types of media and text that people have to be able to read have also increased. Literacy in the digital age means a child must become competent in reading a wide range of texts in various multimedia formats (Withrow 2004: 14, 32).

Literacy is considered a necessity of modern life, but even in the 21st century there are many places in the world where there are illiterate people. According to the most recent UNESCO Institute of Statistics data (June 2007), there are an estimated 781 million illiterate adults in the world (UNESCO. Institute for Statistics 2007). Illiteracy is still a worldwide problem even though the Declaration of Persepolis as far back ago as 1975 declared that the acquisition of the ability to read and write should be considered “a fundamental human right” (Pratt, Nomez & Urzua 1977) and a basic requirement for individual and national development in the modern world.

In South Africa 3,985,000 of the population aged 15 and above cannot read and write (Statistics South Africa 2006: 8). Using the 1995 October Household Survey, the

1996 General Population Census and the 2001 General Population Census, Aitchison & Harley (2006: 91) give an overview of the literacy statistics in South Africa:

Literacy and basic education levels of South Africans aged 15 and over

Level of education	1995 October Household Survey	1996 General Population Census	2001 General Population Census
Full general education (Grade 9 and more)	14,3 million (54%)	13,1 million (50%)	15,8 million (52%)
Less than full general education (less than Grade 9)	12,2 million (46%)	13,2 million (50%)	14,6 million (48%)
Less than Grade 7	7,4 million (28%)	8,5 million (32%)	9,6 million (32%)
No schooling	2,9 million (11%)	4,2 million (16%)	4,7 million (16%)

There has been no decrease in the percentage of functionally illiterate adults (less than Grade 7). Some 32 % of the adult population may therefore be regarded as functionally illiterate and therefore the functional literacy amongst the adult population is estimated at 68% (Aitchison & Harley 2006: 91).

The rapid changes in society set new demands for literacy. Educational reform initiatives around the world have been inspired by the transformation of the global economy during the late twentieth century from an Industrial economy to an Information economy (the Knowledge Society) (Cummins, Brown & Sayers 2007: 40). Schools are expected to develop 21st century literacy skills, which are what the economy requires to survive in a competitive global marketplace.

2.3 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF LITERACY

Learners learn a great deal through social interaction and contact with their environment.

Vygotsky maintained that social connections – talking to and interacting with others – form the basis for the development of higher cognitive learning (Sigelmann & Rider 2006: 45). This approach by Vygotsky is termed a social constructivist approach. The social constructivist approach emphasizes the social contexts of learning and the fact

that knowledge is mutually built and constructed. This approach focuses on the importance of collaboration with others to produce knowledge and understanding (Santrock 2005: 313, 482). It involves social interaction with others, socio-cultural activity and the shared way of thinking among members of social groups. The main implication of Vygotsky's theory for teaching is that learners need many opportunities to learn with the teacher and skilled peers. This theory underlines the assumption in this dissertation that the environment is important for developing a reading culture.

Literacy does not operate in a vacuum but within a social context and what is defined as literacy and especially functional literacy will very much depend on the social context within which a person operates. Literacy is also a cultural phenomenon and therefore can only be adequately defined and understood within the culture in which it exists. What counts as literacy at any particular time, is the result of cultural traditions and social practices of members of a community. How literacy develops and how it is used thus depend on social and cultural settings. The individual engages in roles prescribed by social norms.

Although reading is fundamentally a cognitive-linguistic activity, literacy itself is socially constructed (Pretorius & Machet 2004). This social dimension of learning and reading makes the role of literacy environment in the development of a reading culture so important. Language and literacy are best learned through social interaction with others and develop in participation with skilled partners (Garton & Pratt 1990: 220-221; Verhoeven 2001: 16). The nature of this interaction changes as the child develops and particularly as he moves from home to a broader world. The child's experiences are then changing and expanding and this brings into each new situation his past knowledge and present language resources.

The acquisition of literacy is a social endeavor, so no matter how full of books and print their environment, learners need contact with other literacy users (Salinger 1996: 27). Social interaction helps the learner construct an understanding of how reading works. This means that socio-cultural factors ascribe meaning and value to the act of reading and to the situations in which reading occurs (Pretorius 2002: 170). The major

social influences on the child are the home, and social institutions such as the family, school and library.

The social contact with others – socialisation – starts at home with parents, family or caregivers. Frequently there are other family members who play an important role on the development of the learner. Initially the family constitutes virtually the child's entire social environment.

During the school years the learner is directly influenced by parents, caregivers and the school, and indirectly by the society. The society gives to the school and community sets of objectives and demands - also regarding literacy - and the structure within which to achieve this (Geber & Stanton 1980: 125). Tertiary institutions may make demands on the schools regarding levels of achievement for acceptance. Industry can also demand certain types of skills, certain minimal levels of literacy and numeracy. The general economic needs of the community should also be served. Learners go to school to receive education and they receive education in order to serve the society. These demands vary over time and the relationship between schools and the society as a whole is not static.

The effectiveness of literacy socialisation depends upon the degree to which the different contexts offered by pedagogical, educational, economic, social and cultural practices support each other with respect to the literate knowledge and skills needed to participate (Leseman 1994: 164).

The individual's development is further influenced by the wider social groups of which he is a member - people who belong to the same socio-economic class, profession, church, cultural group or sex, tend to develop in similar ways. They often have similar opinions, values and habits. If reading is important in the group, it could motivate and encourage the individual to read.

Becoming literate involves acquiring membership in a community of practice, and a sense of ownership of the cultural meaning system that informs the literate activities in the community. Different literacy sub-cultures can be defined, reflecting not only

particular language and writing systems, but also distinctive socio-cultural practices (Verhoeven 2001: 18).

Literacy practices have different meanings for members of different groups. The roles individuals and their places within social groups will determine both what is read and what reading is required. Apart from the characteristic reading culture of a specific society, there are also particular subcultures and socio-cultural practices. Contrasting literacy practices within a specific society exist in subcultures such as language groups, social classes, ethnic groups, neighbourhoods and the life experiences of individuals (Heath 1983; Serpell 2001: 243). Smaller social groups such as the family, the peer group, or the classroom may each have their own reading practices.

The cultural aspect of the literacy environment also plays a role in the development of a reading habit. Even within the same culture there can be variety in how learners' speech and literacy events are constructed. As Kale and Luke (1991: 4) state:

The possible activities which people undertake with texts of all kinds are negotiated, constructed, resisted and done in particular sites in everyday cultures. So the sites, norms, practices and purposes of literacy events - instances of daily interaction around and with text - vary greatly across cultures, stressing different values, social actions and inter-relationships.

Understanding of, and attitudes towards literacy by the learner is thus conditioned by the literacy used in their home, school and community environment. According to Serpell (2001: 260):

The development of individual literacy is best conceived as a process of participatory appropriation that takes place within a community of practice, and that the key to engagement with literacy practices such as book reading lies in ensuring full membership of the community, from which flows a subjective sense of ownership of its cultural meaning system.

It is clear that literacy can be understood in the context of the social and cultural practices in which it is acquired and used. By observing other people read and by becoming aware of literacy in practice, the learner realises the value and importance (or unimportance) of literacy.

2.4 LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Literacy involves the use of language. Language is the first step in becoming literate. Language provides the foundation for literacy development.

2.4.1 Language basis for literacy

The processes of language, reading and writing are connected and related to and dependent on one another and cannot be considered separately. It is difficult to say where one starts and the other ends. Learning in one area can have benefits in the other. Speaking, listening, reading and writing are language processes.

The primary form of language is speech. Speech is our basic mode of human communication. It appears from extensive research that parents talk to the child as a baby and introduce the child to the complexities of language (Cairney 2003: 87). Literacy skills are developed through oral means. Mastering the spoken language is usually a prerequisite for fluent reading comprehension in that language. A study by Verhoeven found that literacy is best acquired in the language in which the children have the best oral skills – the mother tongue (Cruickshank 2006: 195-196). Learners will be making reading progress when they have developed the ability to match spoken and written language. Reading thus not only involves reading and writing skills, but also metalinguistic skills.

Children will use the language they hear in their environment. Children's linguistic competence is thus related directly to the language used in the communities in which they are raised. Demonstrations and uses of language are essential elements of literacy learning and metalinguistic awareness. Children learn language and figure out how language functions by observing other language users, by using language within their daily lives, and by engaging with others through the medium of language. Parents and teachers use a certain style of speaking and this style will contribute to the child's literary orientation. Knowledge of language and how language works is the basis for learning to read.

2.4.2 Multilingualism and literacy

Becoming literate is easier when the language of literacy is either the person's mother tongue (first language) or a well-mastered second language. However, across the world many learners have to become literate in a language other than their mother tongue.

UNESCO has repeatedly urged that children be taught to read in their home language where possible (Elley 1992: 59), as children learn to read most successfully when this happens. The IEA study (Elley 1992, p. xii) and PIRLS 2001 study (Mullis, *et al* 2003) found that learners whose home language is different from that of the instruction language at school achieve lower literacy levels than children learning to read in their home language. Ideally, therefore, learners in primary school should have the opportunity to use their first language to learn content and develop literacy. There is also strong evidence that first language literacy is a key factor in second language development. Proficiency in a first language predicts success in studying a second (Abadzi 2006: 55).

Similarly to first language acquisition, second language acquisition is a social and cognitive process. Inputs from the social environment are therefore important. Children make use of both peers and adults around them, both in terms of language input they receive and in terms of using the new language to communicate (Hudelson 1995: 92). Research suggests that a very effective model of second language introduction is 10 percent of the second language in Grade 1, gradually increasing to 20 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent, and 50 percent by Grade 5. Learners who receive such gradual bilingual education will catch up with mother-tongue learners by Grade 5 (Abadzi 2006: 55).

In multilingual societies like South Africa with eleven official languages home language versus language of tuition is a big issue. South Africa is a country of tremendous language, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Millions of children in this country are being raised in homes where a language other than English is spoken. English is the second language for the majority of people and is spoken at home only

by 8,6% of South Africans. IsiZulu (23,8%) and isiXhosa (17,6%) are the dominant home languages of the population, while Afrikaans is spoken as a first language by 14,3% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency 2007).

In spite of this English has become the *lingua franca* in South Africa. It is the favoured language by many parents because fluency in English is likely to provide better employment opportunities, and access to further education. It is perceived as a necessary prerequisite for general socio-economic advancement and is thus regarded as a high-status language. English is the most used language in the world (Withrow 2004: 9).

At present many learners only have three years of mother tongue education. Afrikaans and English are the only two languages in which learners can write their matriculation exams for general subjects. Not all schools teach foundation level literacy in the mother tongue – some go for English from Grade 1. There are also a large number of children who are forced to learn in a second language because there is no school in the vicinity that teaches in the child's home language.

Learner's cognitive and academic language proficiency in their mother tongues needs a much longer period than three years to develop fully before such skills should be transferred to a second language (Jadezweni, *et al* 2004; Western Cape Education Department 2002). A recent study done in Africa on mother tongue education found that it is almost impossible for learners to learn enough of the second language in three years to switch to a second-language medium of instruction by Grade 4 (the case in South Africa) (Heugh 2005: 7). This study further found that children usually need between six and eight years to learn a second language before they can use it as a medium for learning in school. This means under optimal conditions they should not switch language medium before Grade 7 (Heugh 2005: 7). Other research supports this and has repeatedly shown that English second language learners, on average, require *at least* five years of exposure to academic English to catch up to native-speaker norms (Cummins, Brown & Sayers 2007: 51). The largest study internationally has been the *School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students* in the United States by Thomas and Collier in 1997. Approximately 700,000 learners

were used for this study which found that learners need five to seven years to achieve full educational parity with native English speakers (Cruickshank 2006: 140). Although the present Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, has declared the Department's support for the practice of allowing six years of mother tongue education before switching to English medium of instruction (Pandor 2006b), this could take a few years to implement.

Research findings outlined above suggest that multilingualism and the issue of many children learning literacy in a second language could impact negatively on literacy development and motivation to read. It is believed by the researcher that the system of receiving mother tongue instruction for the first three years of schooling and then changing to English as tuition language must be an important factor in the academic failure and high drop-out rate from schools especially by speakers of African languages. They may have the decoding skills but will not yet have comprehension skills in English by the time they change to English. Textbooks are in English and learners have to battle with the language before they can deal with the concepts and contents. No matter what learners' home language is, they are all expected to achieve in literacy at the same level at school. Studying and reading in a second language may also be one of the reasons for lack of achievement and motivation to read.

When a print-rich environment is restricted to the dominant language, children whose home language is a language other than the standard language of power within a society could face many difficulties in literacy learning, especially when they share classes with learners who are already fluent in the language of power (Makin 2003: 332).

Learners are not likely to read voluntarily in a language if they are not sufficiently competent in that language to understand what they read. There is a need to provide many opportunities for these learners to develop and practice language and reading skills.

Another negative factor is that many of the parents do not have the requisite literacy skills to read to their children in English, or to speak to them in English, or to help

them in this regard. Parents often want children to learn English at the expense of their own mother tongue literacy as they may expect a higher or better family income if their children are educated in English (Abadzi 2006: 56). More and more children are sent to schools where the medium of instruction is English although the learners often have little knowledge of English and little exposure to this language in their home environment.

Another reason why many learners might not read for pleasure in South Africa is because they do not have access to reading materials in their home language. Little is available in indigenous languages in which they may be competent. Reading materials in English may be available but their exposure to and knowledge of English may not be sufficient to make them read for pleasure in that language. Land (2003: 94) identifies the devaluing of African languages as languages of reading and learning, and publishers' consequent reluctance to publish in African languages as key issues that undermine the growth of voluntary reading and a reading culture. A continent-wide project by PRAESA, *Stories across Africa*, will involve the collection and writing of stories which can become a core body of children's literature across Africa. African children will have the opportunity to be read to and to read for themselves versions of the same stories in their mother tongue or in the language of their choice (Alexander & Bloch 2004).

Multilingualism also impacts on teachers and the school situation. In many cases teachers face the challenge of teaching both native English-speaking and second-language learners in the same classroom. This requires instructional activities that are appropriate and effective for both these groups. Probyn's research (2001) in township schools on the current practice of using English as medium of instruction demonstrated the stress that teachers (and learners) experience in teaching (and learning) through the medium of a language in which they are not able to communicate freely. Many of the teachers are not fluent speakers or readers of English but they are expected to teach in English (Pretorius 2002: 173-174). Language differences can hinder communication between school and home, as well as communication between teachers and learners.

Home, school and community are important contexts for language learning and use. In the home, school and community children encounter demonstrations of how speech, reading and writing are used and here they involve themselves in using language in order to participate in home and community life. Language issues are vitally important in the development of literacy practices.

2.5 FOUNDATIONS OF LITERACY

Basic literacy skills are essential, as without them one cannot move to higher levels of literacy. Literacy requires a mastery of the skills required to decode and to interpret printed words. During the primary school years the aim is that the learner should be able to understand the text he is reading, to evaluate the content, be able to use and apply the acquired knowledge and to read for pleasure.

2.5.1 Emergent literacy

Learning to read and write begins early in young children's lives. Many of the skills that are used in reading are learnt before the learner enters school. Emergent literacy is "learning about print" (Lapp, *et al* 2005: 4). Emergent literacy skills are developed when the child observes family members using reading and writing in everyday activities, and when stories are read to the child (Machet 2000a: 3). Pre-literacy experiences in a literate family environment (where reading, writing and sharing of stories occur as part of the family routine) is an advantage when a learner starts school, as compared to those without this type of exposure at home (Heath 1983; Machet & Olén 1997; Reese 1995).

Pressley found that more language and communication interactions during the pre-school years result in more complete language development and improved reading achievement later (Pressley 2006: 10). Even before young children start speaking, they discover that there are words for things in the world. From early reading the child discovers many words and forms of language they seldom hear in oral communication. Children to whom stories are read and told by parents or caregivers at an early age tend to develop more sophisticated language structures. Schema (such as story schema) language structures and vocabulary that children gain from early

exposure to literature correlate with their subsequent success in learning to read (Morrow 1993: 131).

Considerable research on emergent literacy development has been done in developed countries, but there is little published research on literacy development in developing countries in general and South Africa in particular. A study by Willenberg (2004) researched emergent literacy competencies, as well as home and school literacy environments of children in kindergartens from historically disadvantaged communities in Cape Town. She came to the conclusion that children who displayed better language and print skills tended to come from families with a stronger English background, more education and higher incomes. These children also had access to book reading experiences at earlier ages and owed more children's books. "In general, both the home and school literacy environments offered limited resources and activities for stimulating literacy, enriching vocabulary development and promoting decontextualised language skills" (Willenberg 2004: ix-x).

2.5.2 Mastering literacy

Reading is a skill, and like any other skill, it needs to be learnt and practiced frequently if a person is to become proficient. There is no single commonly-used approach to learning literacy. Teachers use the *phonics* or the *whole-word* approach to teach reading, or incorporate both approaches.

According to Micheson (1992: 61), four levels of mastering literacy can be distinguished:

1. Language and the communication of language come first and these are founded at home. This is part of emergent literacy.
2. The schooled or formal literacy follows where basic skills are achieved and language and communication skills confirmed.
3. Parallel to this is the acceptance and move towards public literacy - the public *use* of print in mass media and the society as a whole.
4. The final level is the critical use of literacy – functional literacy.

Basic literacy skills are essential as without them one cannot move to higher levels of literacy. During the early primary school years the main aim is to promote basic levels of literacy and the emphasis during this phase is on the development of decoding skills.

Schools in the early grades teach decoding, but in order to achieve literacy far more than this is required. What is required is reading with comprehension. Once learners have been taught to decode, they must learn to read independently and with comprehension so that ultimately they are able to read to learn. There is a quasi-casual relationship between decoding and comprehension insofar as decoding skills are a necessary but not sufficient condition for developing strong reading comprehension skills (Cummins, Brown & Sayers 2007: 35). Decoding and comprehension skills are correlated as a result of the fact that both are strongly influenced by access to and opportunities to engage in print.

It takes learners some years to be able to use reading and writing on a certain level. According to Elkin and Lonsdale (1996: 5) reading events are those where a graphically encoded message is comprehended, that is the ability to make meaning from print. Becoming literate is not just a matter of learning a set of technical skills (decoding, handwriting, spelling). A distinction is made between decoding and comprehension. In decoding written signs and symbols are translated into language. Comprehension is the understanding process where meaning is assigned to the text. Comprehension cannot occur until decoding skills have been mastered, but skill in decoding does not necessarily imply comprehension skill. Many readers may decode text easily, but have difficulty understanding what has just been decoded (Pretorius 2002: 170).

In skilled readers, decoding and comprehension skills interact simultaneously. Literacy consists of particular ways of making, interpreting, and communicating meaning with written language, and becoming literate requires mastering a complex set of understandings, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours, as well as specific skills, related to written language (McLane & McNamee 1990: 141).

Most research activities and policy developments have primarily focused on the cognitive aspects of reading, such as word recognition and comprehension. However, it has become increasingly apparent that purely cognitive accounts of reading are incomplete – just because someone is able to read does not mean that he will choose to do so (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 7).

Research indicates that readers learn most comfortably with materials that are selected as appropriate for their current reading level (Australia. Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1998: 22). Much practice in reading is necessary to read fluently. To enjoy reading for entertainment purposes, and to read voluntarily, the reader must be fluent enough that the story engages the reader without the distractions of the techniques of reading (Withrow 2004: 21).

2.6 CONCLUSION

Literacy is a complex concept with no universally agreed upon definition or standards. A high level of functional literacy is needed to cope in today's information society. In modern society new technologies and new developments set new demands for literacy and literacy practices. Reading education is not completed when children have mastered the basic technical decoding skills. Children need to be able to read for comprehension and for enjoyment. Reading is a matter of skill, and like any other skill, it needs to be learned and practiced frequently if a person is to become proficient. In order to do this they need to have accessible, relevant material, preferably in their home language or language of tuition to read. Reading cannot be learnt in a vacuum. Literacy is a personal, as well as a social skill.

A major problem in South Africa is the issue of eleven official languages and learners who have to deal with reading in a second language.

In the following chapter literacy in action will be looked at and the importance and methods to inculcate positive attitudes and motivation to engage in voluntary reading will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

VOLUNTARY READING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, the meaning and social context of literacy were described. The focus now moves towards voluntary reading. Basic reading and writing skills should not be an end in itself – it is a means to a variety of ends. These skills must reach a certain level before they become tools for those who have acquired them (Meijding 1990: 32). Literacy should move from basic decoding skills to a more advanced use of these skills in order for a learner to become a voluntary reader. The fundamental question is if children do use these skills for voluntary reading.

In this chapter, the benefits of voluntary reading, as well as the importance of attitude and motivation in encouraging learners to read voluntarily, will be discussed. The ability to read and the availability of reading materials do not always lead to a reading habit. The individual who is motivated to read, and who has a positive attitude towards reading, is likely to engage in voluntary reading.

3.2 THE MEANING AND BENEFITS OF VOLUNTARY READING

To engage in voluntary reading, learners must learn literacy skills in the context of reading for pleasure and for information. The message that literacy should convey is that reading is something to learn in order to be able to gain access to a world of fun, excitement and adventure - a means to an end (Jackson 1993: 36).

3.2.1 Defining voluntary reading

The cornerstone of voluntary reading is reading for pleasure or recreational reading. Tellegen and Catsburg (1987: 12) call it “spontaan leesgedrag” (spontaneous reading

behaviour) or the desire to read – “the will to actively and purposefully use the possibilities that reading offers in your own time for more than school and career purposes during school years as well as during adult life”. Reading for pleasure refers to reading that is done out of the reader’s own free will anticipating the satisfaction that he will get from the act of reading and it typically involves materials that reflect the reader’s own choice, at a time and place that suits him (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 6). Voluntary reading has no requirements, no book reports, no journal entries, no chapter questions, no required home reading; it is reading for fun (Marson 1997).

The most important issue is thus that learners have opportunities to read for enjoyment, not only for school and educational purposes. Many children and adults read neither for pleasure nor for information. If parents and the school do not deliberately entice children to read during their early reading years, the desire and motivation to read and to acquire the reading habit may never develop. (Morrow 1993: 130). A child must get the message that reading is worth doing.

Voluntary reading is usually not imposed externally. Reading flourishes when a sense of joy is experienced when reading. According to Morrow (1993: 140) one of the clear points to emerge from research into children with reading failure is that, for them, there is no association between reading and pleasure. Reading for pleasure seems to be an important foundation for developing reading habits – for learners as well as later for adults (Tellegen & Catsburg 1987: 45).

Voluntary reading is likely to take place when the reader gets satisfaction from reading. It is therefore necessary to know why someone would read voluntarily. Tellegen and Catsburg (1987) identify the following reasons:

- Instrumental: Self image, prestige, status – reading to impress;
- Emotional pleasure: Recreation, diversion, excitement, amusement, pastime, to escape/forget reality, to combat boredom, emotional satisfaction;
- Intellectual satisfaction: Knowledge, information, intellectual stimulus, aesthetics, moral insight. Children are curious and inquisitive.

In voluntary reading, it is not only basic skills which become decisive – each learner should learn to be responsible for his own reading and to define his own literacy needs (Meijding 1990: 32).

To engage in voluntary reading activities, a learner must be able to read without difficulty. Salinger (1996: 228) says the ultimate goal for all learners' literacy development is *automaticity* – the point at which the individual can perform complex reading tasks without paying too much attention to the component parts of the activity, as well as to make meaning of what he is reading. McQuillan and Au (2001) also found that more voluntary reading is associated with higher levels of reading proficiency.

3.2.2 Benefits of voluntary reading

Evidence from several studies show that those who do more recreational reading show better reading development, and these results are true for first and second language learners (Cummins, Brown & Sayers 2007, Elley 1992, Krashen 2004a).

The National Literacy Trust in the United Kingdom emphasises the importance of reading for pleasure as one way to advance literacy attainment in children (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 5).

Reading for pleasure has great value and is positively linked to various literacy-related benefits:

- When children read for pleasure, literacy competencies are developed. Several studies that have examined the relationship between the amount of reported pleasure reading and children's reading achievement found that book-reading was the activity which proved to have the strongest correlation with reading proficiency (Cox & Guthrie 2001; Marson 1997; Pucci 1998). Those who read more are better readers.
- Results of research by Cox and Guthrie (2001) show that the amount that learners read for enjoyment and for school is a major contributor to learners' reading achievement. The IEA study (Elley 1992: xiii) found that the amount

of voluntary out-of-school story reading done by a child is positively related to his achievement levels. Similar findings have been made by PISA (OECD 2002) and the PIRLS studies in 2001 (Mullis, *et al* 2003) and 2006 (Mullis, *et al* 2007). Reading for pleasure could therefore be one important way to raise reading standards.

- Marson (1997) found the following benefits from increased reading: reading comprehension is improved, learners' writing styles improve, vocabulary improves, and spelling and control of grammar improve.
- Positive reading attitudes are nurtured which then support the development of a reading habit (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 9);
- Greater self-confidence as a reader (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 9);
- Voluntary reading in later life (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 9);
- There is also evidence that reading for pleasure increases general knowledge, a better understanding of other cultures, and a greater insight into human nature and decision-making (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 10; Krashen 2006).
- Research by Elley and Mangubhai, quoted by Krashen (2006), showed that voluntary reading has a powerful effect on second language learners in helping them mastering the second language.

Krashen (1993: 85) did various studies on voluntary reading and his summary of the value of reading for pleasure is:

When children read for pleasure, when they get "hooked on books", they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all of the so-called "language skills" many people are so concerned about: they will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and become good spellers. Although free voluntary reading alone will not ensure attainment of the highest levels of literacy, it will at least ensure an acceptable level.

The IEA study (Elley 1992: 79) found that one goal of reading instruction which is given high priority in most countries is the development of voluntary reading habits in children. Teachers, principals and most parents would like learners to read regularly as a voluntary activity, both in and out of school.

Voluntary readers believe reading is important, enjoy reading, choose the materials they want to read, and read more often in their spare time.

A positive attitude and motivation to read is the foundation of voluntary reading and the development of a reading habit. In the next section the role of attitude and motivation in the development of voluntary reading will be discussed.

3.3 ATTITUDE TOWARDS READING

The learner's attitude toward reading will play an important role in whether or not the child reads voluntarily.

Attitude can be defined as: "... affective responses that accompany a behaviour of reading initiated by a motivational state" (Guthrie & Knowles 2001: 161). How a learner feels about reading can, to a large extent, determine his ultimate success in reading (Rhodes & Shanklin 1993: 63).

Attitude is a conscious state of readiness which has a direct or indirect influence on a person's actions towards all related objects and situations. Attitudes have a motivating effect upon a person's actions, which are related to the situation or object of his or her attitude (for instance, reading or the school). Attitudes are consciously, or unconsciously, acquired and are usually lasting (Du Toit & Kruger 1994: 60).

Attitudes are shaped by personal values, goals, and self-concepts, which result from a person's beliefs about a situation (Abromitis 2000: 44). The individual's belief structures play a central role in his attitude.

McKenna (2001: 136) describes *reading attitude* as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation". McKenna concludes that:

- attitudes are often viewed as affective in nature (but that they have cognitive components as well),

- they are precursors of behaviour (although they may not always be translated into behaviour), and
- they are acquired on the basis of experience.

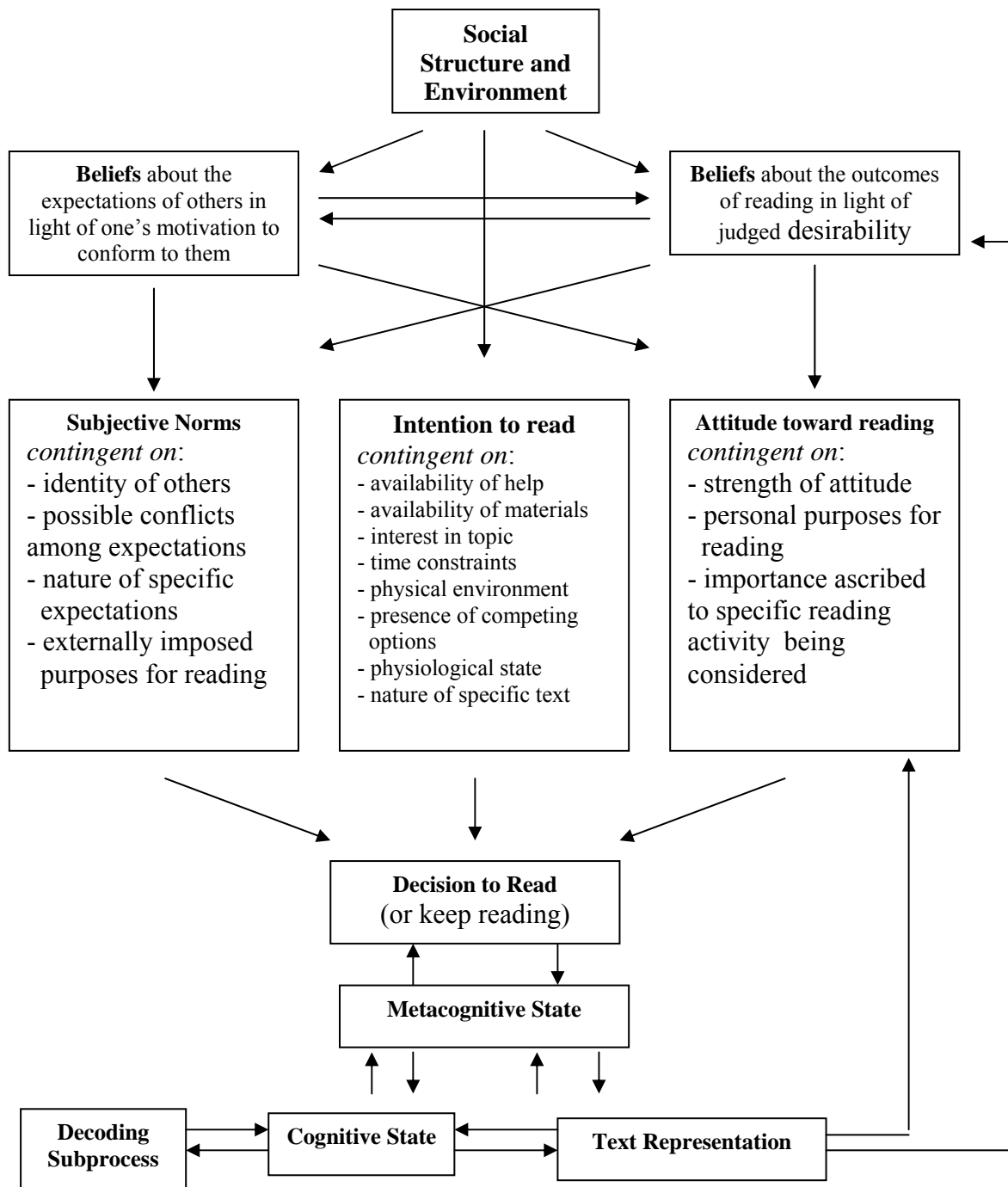
Reading attitudes are related to the experiences learners have had while learning to read, but even positive reading attitudes may change or be reinforced as learners move through the upper grades and into high school. High-achieving learners have more positive attitudes than low-achieving learners. In both PIRLS 2001 and 2006, learners who perceived themselves as good readers and learners with the most positive attitudes toward reading had the highest reading achievement (Mullis, *et al* 2007: 139-142). Reading attitude is also influenced by learner's perceptions of each other as readers, their sense of self-efficacy regarding reading and the reading habits of their families.

The McKenna model of reading attitude acquisition (see Figure 3.1 below) describes a general model of reading attitude formation and identifies three principal factors in the acquisition of attitudes toward reading (McKenna 2001: 139-142):

1. The direct impact of episodes of reading: Each incident of reading is predicted to have a small but real effect on attitudes. This effect may be to reinforce existing attitudes or to alter them.
2. Beliefs about the outcomes of reading: Each episode of reading contributes to the individual's belief structure. These modified beliefs then have their own impact on attitudes. The learner comes to anticipate what reading will be like: frustrating or pleasurable, informative or tedious. Two dimensions of the learner's expectations are especially relevant: The expectation of success versus failure, and the expectation of pleasure versus boredom. To address these expectations, attempts to ensure early success should be made, and support for reading provided, so that learners come to believe that they can read. Also, learners should be exposed to a range of genres, topics, styles and authors so that learners' beliefs about reading will reflect a range of possibilities to include materials they find relevant and enjoyable.

3. Beliefs about subjective norms: The cultural setting of a learner leads to his beliefs about how reading is valued by significant others. This cultural valuing is a subjective norm and implies a standard of behaviour for members of a particular group. If a learner's cultural environment encourages, models, and reinforces reading, positive attitudes should result. The impact of norms begins at home, and interaction with parents may or may not entail positive interactions with print. In both the PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006, reading achievement was higher for learners whose parents had favourable attitudes towards reading (Mullis, *et al* 2003 & Mullis, *et al* 2007). As children grow older, the scope of cultural influence broadens to include members of the social environment beyond the family (See Chapter 2.3). What his group believe and value about reading, will be believed and valued by the individual. The peer group's role in the development of a reading habit will be discussed in Chapter 4.5.1.

Figure 3.1: **Model of Reading Attitude Acquisition**
(McKenna 2001: 140)



Two dimensions of reading attitude can be distinguished: attitude toward recreational reading, and attitude toward academic or school-related reading.

Abromitis (2000: 42-49) studied reading attitudes and distinguishes between different reading attitudes:

- Positive reading attitude: Learners with positive reading attitude enjoy varied reading, and frequently participate in reading activities. They read for

pleasure, enjoy visiting the library, choose to read during free time, read for information, talk about reading, enjoy receiving books as gifts, share books with family members. They have strong feelings of enjoyment when reading for creation or learning. They strongly agree that reading is important. Reading attitudes manifest themselves in reading-related behaviours.

- Neutral reading attitude: Learners with neutral reading attitude read regularly but do not usually participate in reading activities;
- Negative reading attitude: Learners with negative reading attitude do not often choose to read and are undecided about their feelings when reading.

Attitudes towards literacy guide reading actions. When one reads and writes, it is done for specific reasons and purposes (McLane & McNamee 1990: 90). When examining the ways in which literacy functions in people's everyday lives, the reasons for reading become clear. Their reasons for reading are tied to their uses for reading and to the meaning of these activities in their everyday lives. Every literate person thus has a certain view of literacy - what it is and what it can do for him. Sometimes literacy is seen in terms of work, sometimes in terms of leisure.

Studies investigating various aspects of reading attitude found the following:

- Reading attitudes tend to become less positive over time: As learners mature more and more leisure options compete with reading and positive attitudes toward reading will, on average, worsen. Other activities may seem more pleasurable. This is, however, not characteristic of all readers or subcultures (McKenna 2001: 144-145).
- Proficiency: Attitudes worsen more rapidly for poor readers. Many findings relate reading attitude to ability. Low achievers and modest achievers decline most, but high-achieving learners do not easily decline. The older the learners, the wider is the difference in reading attitudes between good and poor readers (McKenna 2001: 145).
- Girls' attitude towards reading tends to be more positive than boys. Gender-specific beliefs relating to reading may explain consistent findings that girls tend to possess more positive attitudes than boys. Parental and societal

expectations of boys may also work against developing positive attitudes towards reading (McKenna 2001: 125-146).

- Ethnic group membership is not, in itself, strongly related to reading attitudes: Membership to an ethnic group might be expected to impose subjective norms about reading, but only to the extent that the group is cohesive and uniform. Mere membership to an ethnic group may involve too broad a categorization for meaningful social norms to affect beliefs. Membership in smaller social units, such as families, classrooms, clubs, and friendships, may well exert stronger normative influences (McKenna 2001: 146).

Many factors can thus influence an individual's attitude toward reading. Because attitudes are difficult to change, the child's educators (parents, teachers, caregivers) should support and guide him in such a way to encourage the formation of positive attitudes towards reading from a young age. One of the first goals in literacy development is, thus, to nurture a positive attitude towards reading. Children's reading habits usually develop early in life. When children learn to read, and have the desire and motivation to use this ability these attitudes can result in voluntary readers.

3.4 MOTIVATION TO ENGAGE IN READING

Reading attitude and reading motivation are two related aspects of reading. These terms are often used interchangeably, but the constructs that underlie each one are different.

- Reading attitudes refer to the feelings and beliefs an individual has with respect to reading.
- Reading motivation refers to the internal or external drives that make a person read.

A person may have a positive attitude towards reading, but may still not be motivated to read. Motivation is stronger than attitude.

Reading motivation is personal and can result in reading engagement and voluntary reading. Researchers have become increasingly aware of the importance of reading motivation in literacy behaviour (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 16).

Reading motivation is defined as “the individual’s personal goals, values and beliefs with regards to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading” (Guthrie & Wigfield 2000: 405). According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), reading motivation is a multifaceted construct that includes reading goals, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and social motivation for reading.

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic, based on different reasons that give rise to an action:

- Intrinsic motivations concern the desire to be engaged in a task for its own sake rather than for a reward (Guthrie & Knowles 2001: 160). Intrinsic motivation refers to wanting to do something simply for the sake of doing it. It is based on personal interest in the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation includes the concept of continuing motivation, or choosing to do an activity outside the context of learning it (Abromitis 2000: 43). According to Guthrie and Knowles (2001: 160) intrinsic motivational orientations include preference for hard or challenging tasks, learning that is driven by curiosity or interest, and striving for competence and mastery. Tellegen and Catsburg (1987: 24) quote three intrinsic reading motivations: curiosity, identification with someone in the direct environment who reads and pleasure in reading. Studies have linked intrinsic reading motivation to greater reading frequency, greater scope of reading, and greater reading enjoyment (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 18). A high level of intrinsic motivation can lead to voluntary reading. Without intrinsic motivation voluntary reading is unlikely to take place, even if the child has a positive attitude towards reading.
- Extrinsic motivation refers to wanting to do something because of a reward or other external stimulus connected with the activity (Guthrie & Knowles 2001: 160). Examples of extrinsic motivators are teacher and family expectations,

recognition, competition and social feedback (Abromitis 2000: 50). Extrinsically motivated learners read because they want to attain certain outcomes.

Research has shown that intrinsic motivation, not extrinsic motivation, predicts reading for pleasure (for example Cox and Guthrie 2001). However, there is evidence that learners are motivated to read by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors: for example, to satisfy their own reading interests and to comply with school demands (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 19).

Motivational factors that enhance reading and learning have a wide range and can include ambition, boredom, fear, academic purposes, nostalgia, aesthetic goals, solving specific problems, and personal and situational interest (Guthrie & Knowles 2001; Verhoeven 2001). All these elements form a complex whole. A reader's motivation may vary according to context, function and text.

Wigfield, along with others at the National Reading Research Center, as quoted by McKenna (2001: 163-164), mention three aspects of motivation for reading engagement:

- Intrinsic motivation for reading, which consists of curiosity (the desire to learn about a particular topic of personal interest), involvement (enjoyment of reading certain kinds of literary or information texts), and challenge (the satisfaction of mastering complex ideas in text);
- Self-efficacy, which refers to self-perceived competence in reading tasks;
- Social motivation, which refers to fulfilling classroom responsibilities or sharing books with others.

A key motivator to read is choice. According to Krashen (1993), learners who choose what they read tend to be more motivated and read more.

To get learners engaged in reading, they must be motivated constantly and continuously to read frequently and widely. Promoting reading motivation depends on many principles operating together – it is not a single variable, but a variety of

variables that will result in the long-term motivation required for learners to become engaged readers.

3.5 CONCLUSION

To learn to read and write – basic literacy – is a short term goal, but to become a lifelong reader involves voluntary reading. Voluntary reading will develop only when a learner can read and chooses to read. Voluntary reading is spontaneous reading for the joy and pleasure of reading, and because one wants to read.

Attitudes prepare the way for a learner's actions, and can play a role in reading motivation. There is an important distinction between attitude and motivation. Attitudes may or may not develop into behaviours. Motivations are reasons for behaviour – the drive to read under particular circumstances. Motivation can be regarded as the individual's reason for engaging in reading. Motivations guide behaviour.

The literacy environment could promote positive attitudes towards reading and nurture enthusiasm for reading, motivate learners to read, and thus encourages voluntary reading.

The next chapter will investigate the various components of the literacy environment from which the learners can get support on the pathway to voluntary reading.

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT READING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand the development of literacy and a reading habit, the environment in which learners develop and the ways in which these settings provide opportunities for learners to become involved in literacy activities needs to be investigated. This chapter will examine aspects relating to the broad context (macro structures – school/libraries/the community) as well as the narrow context (micro structures – home/parents/family/caregivers) of the literacy environment, and how these can individually, and in partnership, support the learner in becoming a reader. The environment includes not only physical surroundings, but also the psychosocial environment – human relationships – which determine when, how often, and in what situations learners are introduced to literacy practices.

The environment is seen as “all the external physical and social conditions and events that can affect us ... from social interactions with family members, peers, and teachers, to the broader cultural context in which we develop” (Sigelman & Rider 2006: 5). Internal and external influences affect the child’s development. The child’s development results from complex interactions of the effects of internal (heredity or other biological differences) and external (environmental variations) influences (Sigelman & Rider 2006: 5). The focus in this chapter is on the external influences.

Many environmental factors play a role in literacy development. According to Szwed (1988: 303) failure of literacy learning is often the result of factors like poor teaching, overcrowded classes, family background, competition with the media, or even the directions of contemporary society itself. The physical environment influences learner’s development and functioning. Poor physical environmental conditions such as poverty, deprivation, stress and anxiety, malnutrition, geographic circumstances

and overpopulation can have effects on the development of learners (Louw 1995; Sigelman & Rider 2006) and could also impact on reading development.

Learners do not only learn and study at school, but at home and in the community as well, and therefore the involvement of the parents and community is important. Literacy thus transcends the boundaries of the school. Much of learners' literacy learning takes place out of school. The classroom environment is important, but literacy environments outside school settings also have a strong influence on the learner's literacy development. Each element of the literacy environment has a certain role to play in the development of a reading habit. Education cannot be isolated from other literacy resources in the community. The relationship between literacy education and the level of stimulation and support learners receive in their daily social and cultural environment is thus important.

To understand any aspect of development, including literacy development, it is important to examine each of the relevant contexts (home, school and community) and their interrelationship, including the beliefs and values of the adults responsible for structuring the environments.

4.2 LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

The literacy environment is synonymous with print in the environment and the use thereof. A review of research suggests that two aspects of the environment are of particular importance in literacy development: interactions between the learner and adults, like family and teachers, who mediate their literacy learning, and the availability of appropriate resources including reading materials and libraries (Makin 2003: 327).

One of the first settings in which many children encounter the meaning and function of print, is environmental print – that is, the text in the world around them, including print in children's communities and homes, and print on television and billboards. (Hudelson 1995: 94). Early awareness of, and interaction with environmental print occurs across socio-economic classes.

Children encounter literacy in situations in which people react to messages from print and so they react to those messages too. According to Garton and Pratt (1990: 157) the amount of contact children have with different types of print will vary greatly. Graff (1992: 5) states that the environment in which learners acquire their literacy has a major impact on the cognitive consequences of their possession of the skill and the uses to which it can be put.

A distinction can be made between home and school literacy. In the school the clear focus is on reading and writing. In the home environment literacy is less frequently the main focus of attention, except when the child is doing a school-related activity, or is reading for pleasure. Literacy is serving another purpose here: it is a means rather than an end, perhaps to a greater extent than it is in the classroom (Walker 1996: 210).

The literacy environment is one aspect of the child's environment as a whole, but other environmental influences will also play a role in the development of a reading habit. Although all the elements and effects of the environment cannot be tested in the empirical research, possible influences must be considered. Different factors contribute to the establishment of voluntary reading, but they cannot be compartmentalised as their effect on learners complement one another.

One of the strategies in the UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006* to enhance literacy is the “development of environments conducive to the meaningful use of literacy” and includes the use of books and libraries (UNESCO 2005). The literacy environment provides material and opportunities to enrich literacy skills by providing access to schools, libraries, book shops and similar services where reading materials are made available.

4.2.1 Environmental conditions for learning literacy

Rhodes and Shanklin (1993: 54-63) have identified three major environmental conditions that are necessary for literacy learning: demonstration, engagement and sensitivity.

1. *Demonstration:*

Learners realise the importance of reading if they witness demonstrations of literacy within their everyday lives over time. When learners see parents or other significant adults read and write – observe them interacting with print in the environment – or when literacy products are available, they demonstrate to learners what literacy is.

Children can learn a great deal about literacy by observing literacy activities at home. Role models and examples set by parents are important for learners' involvement in reading (Hannon 1995; Machet & Pretorius 2003; Morrow 1993; Mullis, *et al* 2003; Mullis, *et al* 2007; Taylor 1983; Weinberger 1996). When children see parents reading the newspaper or a book, they will want to follow their example. In the home context, brothers and sisters, as well as other family members also may provide role models which learners imitate.

According to Hudelson (1995: 96-97), various studies showed that families engage in:

- Instrumental reading to gain information about and accomplish practical goals of daily life;
- Social-interactional reading to gain information pertinent to building and maintaining social relationships;
- News-related reading to gain information about events in the world;
- Recreational-pleasure reading to spend leisure time and plan recreational events;
- Confirmational reading to check or confirm facts and/or beliefs;
- Critical-educational reading to increase one's knowledge;
- Reading to explore one's personal and cultural identity;
- Reading to consider changes in one's economic life.

In these settings children see multiple demonstrations of literacy for multiple purposes.

In school, the teacher is the key figure in demonstrating literacy to learners: how reading and writing processes work, attitudes toward literacy, literacy materials, kinds

of reading and writing, and reasons for reading and writing. As a result of seeing demonstrations of literacy at home, many learners experience school literacy quite differently from home literacy (Heath 1983).

At home, literacy is often for communicative purposes, and for fun and enjoyment, but at school, for assignments and work. At home, the child may have more of a choice and variety in what literacy activities they choose to do, whereas at school it is usually more determined. If the literacy demonstrations in one area are limited, a greater responsibility rests upon the other to compensate.

Where learners interact with each other during literacy activities in classrooms, they provide important literacy demonstrations for each other. Demonstration of literacy has two facets: people, and literacy materials.

2. Engagement:

The development of a reading habit is an active process and requires the active involvement of the individual. People can demonstrate reading, but unless learners engage actively in reading individually, they will not become readers. Engagement includes interactions with reading between parent and learner, teacher and learner, among learners themselves and among learners and others outside of the school environment.

The PISA study underlines the importance of learner engagement (OECD 2003: 8):

Students who are habitual readers and who enjoy reading are more likely than others to have high levels of reading literacy. Greater engagement in literacy can be a consequence, as well as a cause of higher reading skill, but the evidence suggests that these are mutually reinforcing.

Guthrie's research, as cited by Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2007: 48), also draws attention to the importance of literacy engagement. Guthrie notes that the term *engagement* incorporates notions of time on task (reading extensively), *affect* (enthusiasm and enjoyment of literacy), *depth of cognitive processing* (strategies to deepen comprehension) and *active pursuit of literacy activities* (amount and diversity

of literacy practices in and out of school) Furthermore, he asserts that engaged reading is often socially interactive insofar as engaged learners are capable of sharing with friends despite the fact that much of their reading may be solitary.

To create a world of engaged readers, attention should be given to the affective side of literacy, the enjoyment that readers derive from reading, the motivations that drive them to read and to spend time reading, the wide variety of social and cultural factors that influence motivation to read, and the array of forms that literacy can take and roles that it can play.

Access to and availability of print materials and books is an important factor to get learners engaged in reading. A study by McQuillan, as quoted by Krashen (2006), took into account the access to public and school libraries and the number of books available in learners' homes, and he concluded that if children had access to reading materials from any of these sources, they are much more likely to become voluntary readers. However, Verhoeven (2001: 18) states, availability is not sufficient in Third World schools and teachers also have to be shown how to use the books in the classroom.

Parents interacting with children on reading-related activities, events and practices, for example by sharing books and stories, may encourage children to read. Research by Hill *et al.* (1998), Meek (1991), Phillips and McNaughton (1990) and Snow (1993) confirms that shared reading is an important family literacy practice. Reading matters if it is a part of daily recurrent routines. Book reading is not effective as an incidentally occurring event.

Literacy materials, and their organisation in classrooms and in libraries encourage and invite learners to engage in literacy activities. By providing time and a variety of literacy experiences learners have opportunities to engage in reading. Reading – silently and aloud – in class encourages engagement in reading. This is discussed in section 4.5.2.1 in more detail.

3. Sensitivity:

Engagement in literacy is not likely to occur unless the learner is sensitive to engagement. Attitudes, motivation and interests go hand in hand with sensitivity and these will affect the learner's engagement in literacy. Together they determine how open a learner is to a particular literacy activity.

Literacy learning is a two-way process, and demonstration, engagement and sensitivity are necessary to maximise this. Support from the literacy environment provides children with demonstrations of how literacy is used, opportunities to engage in reading, and sensitivity towards reading. Through example, conversation and shared activities, learners might not only read, but have fun in the process.

4.2.2 Stories as part of the literacy environment

Stories are an important part of the literacy environment. Story reading strongly attracts children to books. Everyone loves a story – humans seem to have a natural affinity for stories. Research by Elley (1992), Heath (1983), Machet and Pretorius (2003), McNaughton (1995), Snow, *et al.* (1991), Wade (1984) and Wells (1985) shows that reading stories to children is highly effective in getting learners engaged in reading. Outcomes of a series of studies carried out on European and American families support the role of book reading as the single most important family routine for building understanding and skills essential for reading success (Bus 2001: 39). Weinberger (1996: 35-35) found that children's reading achievement increased if story-time experiences included requesting stories and talking to the parents about the stories, as well as listening to stories. Story reading can teach children that reading is enjoyable and this could lead to voluntary reading.

Machet and Pretorius (2003) emphasize the importance of preschool literacy involvement. Sharing stories with pre-schoolers is the most powerful predictor of later reading achievement (Weinberger 1996: 34). Research dating back at least sixty years also shows that storybook reading is the single most important literacy experience preschoolers can have that affects their readiness for school and continued school achievement (Teale 1995: 117).

Many studies on parent-child storybook reading concentrated on mothers reading to their children, but Rhodes and Shanklin (1993: 89) found that educators are becoming more and more aware of the important role that fathers, other significant adults and older siblings play as they read with learners.

Story reading should not be confined to the home, but should be an integral part of the daily classroom activities, most notably in the primary school years, but also in secondary school. Reading aloud is just as important for older children as it is for younger ones. Research carried out with school-age children shows that learners who had been read to by their teachers were significantly ahead of learners who had not been given such opportunities (Rothlein & Meinbach 1991: 5). Teachers who set aside specific time for reading and who read to learners, let learners realise reading is important. When teachers value and enjoy stories, they send the message that sharing stories is fun, worthwhile and meaningful. Learners will begin to look forward to the reading time. "The vast majority of children love stories read to them, and those for whom the introduction to reading is a pleasant experience also realise the enjoyment they can get from reading stories themselves" (Wray & Medwell 1991: 51).

Literature in school is an important part of the literacy environment. According to Verhoeven (2001: 9-10), literature has the power to enhance the intrinsic motivation of learners to read because of its appeal to their natural curiosity and aesthetic involvement. Good literature provides a study of universal values and needs and captures learners' interests.

Stories in the classroom can be a shared pleasure. In a study done in Israel (Rosenhouse, *et al.* 1997), teachers read interactively to their learners - they interacted with the learners before, during and after reading in order to help them understand the story. Their findings indicated that reading by teachers from a series of stories was shown to have the greatest effect on reading achievement, on the extent of reading for pleasure, and on the quantity of books purchased for leisure reading.

Story hours are important as a part of library outreach programmes. Listening to a story in a book-filled environment can stimulate children to borrow books. Through read-aloud story hour programmes, the librarian reaches children directly (Teale 1995: 118).

Stories may thus very well help prepare learners for a lifetime engagement in reading and form an important part of the literacy environment.

4.2.3 Environmental differences between the developing and developed world, with special reference to South Africa

Environmental factors that enhance reading vary in different parts of the world. Promoting reading and literacy in the developing world is often difficult and problematic. KaiKai and KaiKai (1992: 109-115) did a comparative analysis of the home and social environments in the developed and developing world and suggest that many different factors influence reading success or failure. This background could help to understand the situation in South Africa better. The following table shows a summary of this study:

Environmental differences between the developing and developed world

Developing world students

Home environment

English, French and Spanish are secondary languages.

Books rarely available.

Magazines and newspapers rarely available.

Telephone, TV and radio rarely available.

Inadequate lighting for reading.

Inadequate space for quiet, sustained silent reading.

Assignment of regular household chores household before and after school.

Minimal parent/adult interaction with children.

Low literacy levels of parent/caregiver.

Developed world students

Home environment

English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese are primary languages.

Books readily available.

Magazines and newspapers available.

Telephone, TV and radio available.

Adequate lighting for reading.

Adequate space for quiet, sustained silent reading.

Freedom from routine or regular chores before and after school.

Maximum parent/adult interaction with children.

High literacy levels of parent/caregiver.

Inadequate financial resources to support reading.

Social factors

Multilingual society (numerous languages).

Insignificant public financial support for reading.

Few, if any, professional reading organisations.

Little or no private support for reading.

Few national publishing companies.

Inadequate and in most instances non-existent authorship copyright.

Few public and private libraries.

Peer pressure to participate in social and non-literacy activities.

Population centered in rural areas.

Inadequate public transportation.

Scarcity and governmental control of information.

Low per capita income.

Few reading specialists/clinicians available to assist students with reading disabilities

Low tolerance for students with diverse reading abilities.

Public libraries inaccessible with public transportation.

Adequate financial resources to support reading.

Social factors

Monolingual or oligolingual society (one or few languages).

Significant public financial support for reading.

Many professional reading organisations.

Significant private support for reading.

Numerous national and international publishing companies.

Strict copyright laws to protect authorship copyright

Numerous public and private libraries.

Peer pressure to read and demonstrate literacy skills.

Population centered in urban areas.

Adequate public transportation.

Wealth of and uncontrolled information.

High per capita income.

Many reading specialists/clinicians available to assist with reading disabilities.

High tolerance for students with diverse reading abilities.

Public libraries accessible with adequate public transportation

Significant differences between the home and social environments of the developing and developed nations are indicated. According to Elley (2001: 232), in spite of the increased enrolments in Third World schools in recent years, the quality of their school learning is often not what it could be. An important factor in this regard is the societies' attitudes towards reading and the strength of their literacy traditions.

Many of the environmental obstacles to reading listed above apply to South Africa, as the South African society has issues and problems that could influence literacy development negatively. South Africa has a prevalence of characteristics of both an information society and a developing country. The areas of industrialisation are generally concentrated in the urban areas and are in striking contrast to the underdevelopment of many rural regions.

Reading materials are, to a large extent, dependent on economic means. Economic constraints hinder reading development in South Africa. According to a labour force survey in September 2006 (*Stats in brief* 2007: 52), the unemployment rate in South Africa is 25,5%. Many parents are unemployed and their annual income falls below the poverty level. A study done in 2004 among 34000 learners from 1000 schools countrywide indicated that a large number of learners did not attend school from time to time because parents could not afford school fees (Pandor 2006a).

Graves, Juel and Graves (2001: 23) found that the reading proficiency of learners attending schools in disadvantaged communities lags very significantly behind that of learners attending schools in advantaged communities. In South Africa many schools are in disadvantaged communities and there is a great difference between those schools and those in advantaged communities. Children raised in poor homes may have little exposure to books or to parents who read. In some cases, literacy has been valued at home, but little or no money is available to purchase books or other reading materials. Scientific research shows that the social disparities related to poverty exert a considerably greater influence on reading development than instructional variables and, furthermore, intervention at the social level can significantly improve achievement among learners from low-income families (Cummins, Brown & Sayers 2007: 19).

The physical environment influences learners' development and functioning. Overcrowded and inadequate housing mean that learners do not have a quiet place where they could read. Poor physical environmental conditions – such as malnutrition, geographic circumstances, and overpopulation – can effect the development of learners and could also impact on reading development (Louw 1995; Pandor 2006a). Lack of electricity or proper lighting at home can also hinder reading development as voluntary reading is most likely to occur at home.

The socio-economic status of the home environment can influence learners' reading behaviour. More affluent homes usually have more books, more models of reading, and provide more leisure time for reading than those in lower socio-economic areas (Heath 1983; Krashen 1998: 14; Raban 1991). When other sources of books are not

available, the library could fill the gap if there are libraries, but many South Africans do not have access to libraries (see section 4.6). The socio-economic situation of the parents can also influence the choice of school.

Many social factors can hinder the development of a reading habit. Some parents are unable to become involved in supporting their children in developing their reading, because of work and other commitments. Many parents acknowledge the importance of reading with and to children but do not always have the time. The need for both parents to go out to work and the absence of someone responsible at home to take care of children, means that many are left without adult supervision. The Belfield Reading Project in Rochdale showed that parents who were not involved in their children's reading development were affected by a combination of adverse factors, including unemployment, chronic ill health, financial difficulties, and lack of reading materials in the home (Weinberger 1996: 24). An additional factor in South Africa is that, due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, many children in South Africa have been orphaned and may not have family support.

Some parents do not value literacy and may be uncooperative and uninformed about supporting their child's literacy development. Money is available, but since literacy itself is not valued, money is not spent on magazines, newspapers and books.

The PISA study found that the level of a learner's reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a learner's interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages (OECD 2003: 8). This could serve as motivation to address the problems in South Africa.

4.3 HOME ENVIRONMENT

Various studies – Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002), Heath (1983), Snow, *et al.* (1991), Taylor (1983), Weinberger (1996), Withrow (2004: 37) – found that a home environment rich in literacy activities has a lasting influence on reading development and that a positive relationship between books in the home (either owned, or ready

accessed through a library) and children's reading exists. Research has also shown that parental involvement in the child's literacy practices is sometimes a more powerful force than other family background variables such as social class and the level of parental education (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 24).

It is in the home environment that the earliest learning occurs and learning continues in the home even when the learner goes to school. Children learn first and foremost from their parents, or others that stand in a parental relationship to the child.

The home literacy environment can be characterised by the variety of resources and opportunities provided to children as well as by the parental skills, abilities, dispositions, and resources that determine the provision of these opportunities for children (Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan 2002: 413). In a home environment that supports literacy, books, magazines, newspapers and other reading materials are readily available. The IEA studies found that in many countries there was a strong relationship between the number of books in learners' homes and their voluntary reading and reading achievement (Elley 1992: 83; Mullin, *et al* 2007: 110).

Studies of children's literacy development at home have shown that this often happens as an integral part of everyday life rather than as something separate (Weinberger 1996: 21). Parents' interaction with their children often occurs naturally on an informal basis, without parents being consciously aware that they are actually teaching. The home environment can be seen as a micro system where learning takes place informally.

The home literacy environment is composed of a variety of attitudes, resources, and activities that are interrelated. The study by Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002: 413) identified different conceptualisations of the home literacy environment, each equally important:

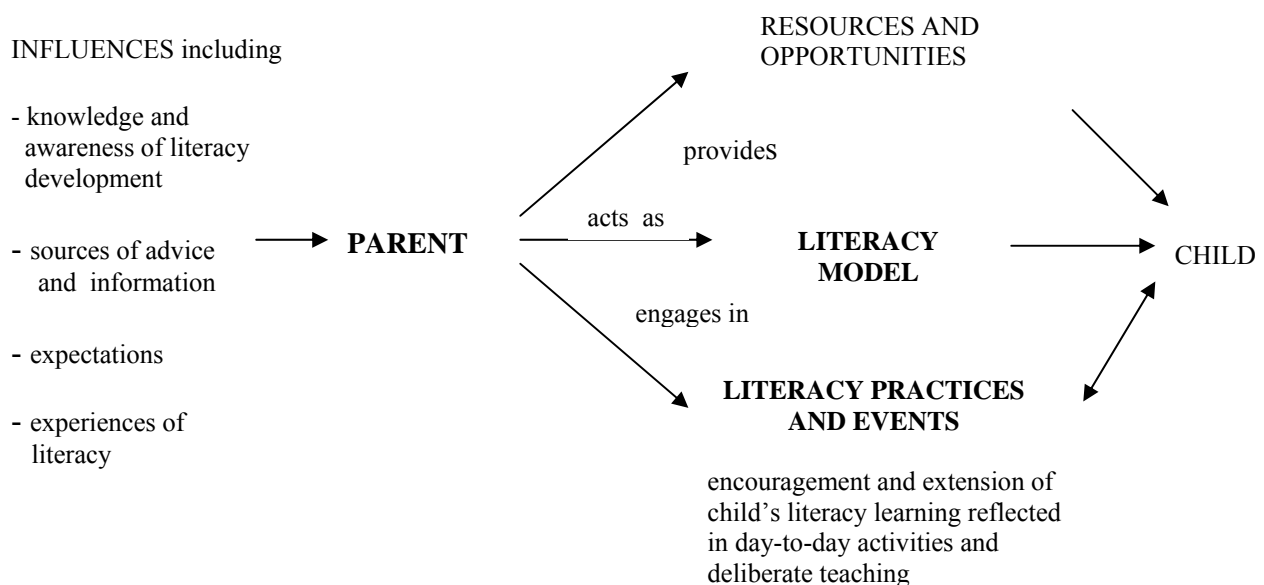
- *Limiting environment* assumes that a parent's ability and disposition to provide literacy opportunities to children are determined by the resources at their disposal. Examples of these resources include parental characteristics such as intelligence, language and reading ability, and attitudes towards education.

- *Literacy interface* assumes that parents participate in a number of activities that serve to expose children to literacy activities either directly or indirectly, or to the parent's views about the importance of literacy. Literacy interface can be further divided into activities and opportunities based on how people acquire information.
- *Passive home literacy environment* includes those parental activities that expose children to models of literacy usage (for example, seeing a parent read a newspaper). The focus in passive home literacy environment is on the role of indirect learning from role models, not to teach directly.
- *Active home literacy environment* includes those parental efforts that directly engage the child in activities designed to foster literacy or language development (rhyming, games, shared reading).
- *Shared reading* is a most commonly used measure of the home literacy environment.

The overall home literacy environment assumes that each of these conceptualisations is interrelated and equally important. The overall home literacy environment includes all of the aspects of the other conceptualisations.

Weinberger's (1996) framework (see Figure 4.1 below) of the influence of parents on their children's literacy development includes all the above-mentioned issues.

Figure 4.1: The influence of parents on their children's literacy development (Weinberger 1996: 144).



The framework shows some of the influences that may affect parents' behaviour, including sources of advice and information, contact they may have with their child's school, their experiences and expectations, and their knowledge and awareness of literacy development.

The beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that parents or other caregivers hold regarding reading are likely to have an effect on children's attitude and motivation to read. In a supportive literate home environment positive attitudes toward reading are expressed by family members, and children are guided in developing positive attitudes toward reading and books (KaiKai & KaiKai 1992; Morrow 1995; Weinberger 1996). Parents who feel literacy is important usually influence children to feel the same.

Although the home environment can be seen as a micro system, it cannot be separated from the surrounding social and cultural contexts constituted by parents'/caregivers' education, work, social networks, and cultural practices. Other aspects of the home which could influence children's literacy development are:

- *Parents' educational level:* It is generally accepted that there is a high correlation between literacy in parents and literacy in their children (Salter & Salter 1991; Wagner 1992; Weinberger 1996). Another predictor of literacy development is especially the mother's education level and the mother's expectations for the child (Verhoeven 2001: 125). However, a study by Arendse (2006: 3) found that the literacy level of the parents in the sample group was not a significant factor in determining the literacy abilities of their children, but rather the extent to which the learners had greater access to the world beyond their immediate surroundings.
- *Home literacy/illiteracy:* Parental literacy level and disposition towards literacy and education, may play a role in determining the home literacy environment parents provide their children (Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan 2002: 243). Literate parents are role models for their children in terms of literacy. They are also able to help their children with homework. Illiterate parents are

unable to do this. The home and school tuition language may also differ which may also cause problems (refer to section 2.4 in this regard).

- *Cultural background:* Cultural attitudes at home may influence parental participation in children's schooling, or literacy acquisition, when it differs from the mainstream culture in a society or the culture at the school – for example, first world (written culture) versus third world (oral culture) cultures. According to Bus (2001: 49), the cultural background of the parents can have an effect on the quality of support offered by the parents during reading activities. In addition to facets such as parental literacy, culturally specific child-rearing patterns may influence how parents respond to and support their children during reading activities. Studies of the home literacy environment found that children from lower socio-economic status and non-mainstream cultural communities did not perform as well on reading tests and demonstrated lower levels of interest in literacy (Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan 2002: 411).

Many of these are a problem in South Africa.

Urbanisation can have an influence on reading. Various studies in The Netherlands (Tellegel & Catsburg 1987: 84) showed that in urban areas it is likely that there are more readers because of greater availability of and access to reading materials. However, access to the internet has mitigated this to some extent.

Some parents from disadvantaged communities have begun to realise the importance of literacy development. Learners need literacy and language skills to get jobs. Numerous financial sacrifices are often made to pay school fees and buy books to maximize educational opportunities. These sacrifices are perceived as motivation for reading and academic success (KaiKai & KaiKai 1992: 113). However, parents who do not have a reading culture themselves may see reading as linked only to educational purposes and so do not encourage their children to read for pleasure.

When looking at these problems and ways to promote reading at home, one realises how big the challenge in South Africa is. The lack of social, political, and economic support for many parents in dealing with housing, health, and other social problems, puts children at risk.

4.4 HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

The role of parents, as perceived by schools, has changed over the years. Family involvement in children's education has become widely recognised as an important element in effective schooling (Cairney 2003: 85). An alliance between home and school is increasingly believed to be vital to the success of educating learners and developing literacy. The best milieu for developing literacy occurs when authentic, reciprocal relationships between home and school lead to valuing and building upon the literacy practices of both (Foote & Linder 2000: 159).

According to a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate in the UK, "understanding by the parents of the school's policy on the teaching of reading and how it is put into practice is the heart of successful home-school partnerships" (Weinberger 1996: 23). Many parents see their role in working with the school as needed only when problems arise, or they may even have fears about schools and teachers. Some teachers have biases and misinformation about characteristics such as socio-economic status, race, religion and education (Foote & Linder 2000: 161-162). If teachers understand that parents do care, but have diverse ways and skills in demonstrating that, they can create opportunities that match families' needs and abilities.

Many parents do not think they have a responsibility once the child goes to school. Cruickshank's research (2006: 49) confirmed that many parents saw the development of literacy as the responsibility of the teachers. They are not supportive of their children's reading and learning and do not know what their children are doing at school. However, a home-school partnership can give the learner a much better opportunity to develop his literacy skills and a reading habit. Home support for the school can strengthen learners' overall learning. Parents then become partners in their children's education.

Parental contact with the school and knowledge about school issues can indicate that parents value education. Just by making sure that children prepare for school and attend school on time and by checking their schoolwork, interest is shown.

Communication between the school and home is a key aspect of parental involvement. The Haringey Project, a study in inner London, found that what was significant for children's literacy development was the number of contacts parents had with the school, and their knowledge about what happened in school (Weinberger 1996: 38). Parents welcome clear communication with teachers about how to help their children at home. Parents who understand what is going on in their child's classroom are more likely to be more supportive of the teacher and school work. Elkin and Lonsdale (1996: 9) emphasize that parents and teachers need to cooperate in the teaching of literacy and that literacy practised beyond the school should be acknowledged.

Foote and Linder (2000: 160) distinguish between surface structure and deep structure levels of parent-school relationships. Surface structure encounters between parents and the school – such as open houses, special events promoting literacy, literacy activities to do at home, activities requiring parents to read to or monitor their child's reading – can serve as useful starting points. However, a relationship that involves deep structure should develop over time. A deep structure relationship requires repeated encounters focused on a mutual goal or mission that results in each participant – the teacher and the parent – developing an understanding and respect for the background experiences, knowledge, insight, abilities and potentialities of the other. A deep structure relationship concerns awareness of the strengths and struggles of the other.

The Haringey Project demonstrated that parental involvement in hearing children read at home increased children's performance in reading tests (Weinberger 1996: 39).

Serpell (2001: 261) identified four different and complementary approaches that can enhance the quality of home-school connections to engage learners in reading among American minority-culture groups:

- enriching the cultural repertoire of the family;
- recruiting caregivers through their own literate engagement;
- mobilising indigenous cultural resources;
- empowering the community in the organisation of schooling.

These approaches could also be useful in South Africa.

Family literacy initiatives and programmes have been developed to strengthen home-school relationships, to enable schools to build upon learners' learning from home, to transmit the culture of school literacy to the family and to facilitate continuous learning for all (Auerbach 1995; Foote & Linder, 2000). Family literacy programmes help parents understand school-based literacy practices and teachers to understand home-based literacy practices.

Many other studies underline the importance of the home-school partnership in getting learners involved in reading. Studies by Epstein, as well as Snow, quoted by Weinberger (1996: 26), found that teacher encouragement of parental involvement contributed indirectly to increases in children's reading involvement. Hamadache and Martin (1986: 26) state that there is a close interdependence between the formal education of learners and the literacy of their parents with each reinforcing the other. Parents' interest in their children's reading achievement is seen as a powerful element in combined teaching strategies (Littlefair 1994: 4).

Most teachers know very little about the children they teach in their home context. By finding out more about literacy practices and events at home, teachers would be in a better position to understand those aspects of literacy the learners have already learnt (Weinberger 1996: 39).

Teachers thus need an understanding of the literacy existing and developing within the homes of their learners, the possibilities of learning with and from families, and the knowledge and skills necessary to create and sustain parent-teacher partnerships.

4.5 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Reading is the foundation for progress in all areas of education. The school plays the most important role in the acquisition of the technical skills of reading and writing. Literacy learning is considered to be the most essential skill to be gained and one of the prime areas of importance in the primary school. Teachers and schools are expected to take responsibility for making learners literate.

Cruickshank (2006: 206) pointed out that the main issue in the study of literacy in community, home and school contexts has been the way in which a version of school literacy has become dominant.

The school environment and community are part of the macro system in which learning takes place.

4.5.1 The socio-cultural context of literacy in school

Literacy learning and development in school take place within the socio-cultural practices of the classroom. Most of school learning takes place in a group context.

4.5.1.1 The social context of literacy in school

Literacy in school has a social context, and classroom activities have a social nature. The way teachers and learners interact is a social practice. Vygotsky has argued that children are social beings who develop and learn through their interactions with parents and teachers (Sigelman & Rider 2006: 45). The social milieu in which learners read is likely to influence their motivation to read.

Classrooms can be viewed as communities and three levels of social groups within this community can be distinguished (Jackson 1993: 8 - 9):

- teacher and class (the role of the teacher is discussed further in 4.5.3);
- teacher and individual;
- peer - peer.

Each of these three social groups mentioned above has a role to play in creating a reading environment in the classroom. Daisey (2000: 154) describes the classroom environment as a literate community – a place where people read, write, and talk about reading and writing, where everybody can be student and teacher, where everybody can come inside.

The view of the peer group on reading can influence a learner (Machet 2001; Tellegen & Catsburg 1987). Learners can encourage one another when they interact with each other during literacy activities in the classroom. Recommendations by peers relating to reading are most likely to be more influential than recommendation by a teacher. As learners get older, the peer group plays an increasingly important role in their lives. If a peer group views reading as boring and as a waste of time, this view may be expressed orally from time to time in classroom settings when reading needs to be done. The degree to which such expressions influence an individual's attitude is determined by how strongly the individual identifies with the group. Where reading is negatively valued by peers from whom the learner seeks approval, the learner is unlikely to develop positive reading attitudes.

A useful approach is called “buddy reading”, when two learners reader together (Salinger 1996: 195). This is child to child reading. Various Buddy Reading Projects

have shown how effective buddy reading is to improve reading skills, as well as to motivate learners to read.

Low group cohesion is a threat to reading motivation in the social milieu – if the social group has not acquired the disposition to listen, exchange, and value the thoughts of all participants, the group is unlikely to motivate reading activity (Guthrie & Knowles 2001: 172). A study by Almasi (1995) reported that it may require weeks of interaction before a group of 9-year-olds becomes cohesive enough to talk, discuss, and share reading. Another threat to the social collaborative principle is a loss of cognitive challenge. If the conversational interchange is off-task, non-conceptual, or cliquish, it may decrease rather than increase the motivation of the members for extended reading.

The social and cultural context of the school environment go hand in hand.

4.5.1.2 School ethos, school culture and literacy

One consistent finding of research into effective schools is that the school ethos and school culture are important factors (Fisher 1995: 146): Ethos is defined as the climate of the school, and is expressed in the organisational conditions and personal relationships within the school. The culture includes those norms, atmosphere, beliefs and values that become modes, standards and rules of operation. Each school has its own culture of literacy that gives meaning to its educational programme.

Within a school, each classroom also develops its own culture of literacy. Individual members of the social group bring their own perspectives and the development of literacy within a classroom could be the result of all these individual literacies. If learners have already learned much about print and how it works from previous experiences, teaching becomes a matter of helping them to apply that knowledge to new situations. As learners make their own meanings from the literacy culture in which they find themselves, they are making meaning of what literacy can do for them and this could result in voluntary reading.

A country's education system is the result of a series of decisions and compromises made in response to the specific goals, priorities, politics, economics, resources, and historical traditions of its government representatives and citizens (*PIRLS 2006 Encyclopedia* 2007: 4). Multiculturalism is a characteristic of the society as well as education in South Africa. In the South African society there is a diversity of cultures and ethnicities and the uses and meaning of literacy in the home and community are many and varied. Learners of all backgrounds, languages and experiences need to be acknowledged and valued.

Teachers are often familiar with the literacy practices in their own environment and these may differ from the learner's sub-cultural group.

Learners come from diverse backgrounds. A classroom can be a mix of learners from various cultures, social classes and experiences. Multilingual and multicultural realities and needs must be taken into consideration. Learners bring to school diverse oral and literate competencies, as well as specific views and values of literacy which may or may not be the same as those valued in the classroom. Approaches to literacy in schools favour those learners whose previous language and literacy socialisation matches that offered by the school (Kale & Luke 1991: 1).

According to Mathis (2000: 228), the following issues are important in culturally responsive instruction:

- Knowledge of learner background and of the communities from which they come;
- Application of this knowledge to instructional strategies;
- Awareness of various strategies that can be appropriately adapted to the culturally and linguistically diverse learner;
- Authentic opportunities to use language;
- Conscious determination as to how much and when to use first and second languages;
- Culturally rich resources, such as authentic children's literature;
- Culturally sensitive communication.

Teachers are confronted with increasing demands to ensure that instruction is culturally relevant and responsive.

4.5.2 Classroom environment

The classroom environment and literacy activities provided must be meaningful, relevant and purposeful in order to create an environment for pleasurable literacy experiences.

4.5.2.1 General classroom environment

A literate classroom is a total environment rich in literacy materials, alive with print, from things as simple as signs right through to literature. It thus includes books and other reading material, writing materials, environmental print and places for using these. It is important that school literacy does not concentrate only on educational uses of literacy and language – it should include non-school uses and reading for fun. Reading will be much more successful if the learner can see the relation of literacy in the classroom to his other interests.

Textbooks are an important part of the classroom environment. According to the 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report, textbooks increase the efficiency of educational systems and have a strong impact on learning and reading, but they often account for only a small percentage of education spending (Abadzi 2006: 89-90). Learners are more likely to learn the material if they have it readily available for study and they can get reading practice easily through textbook use at home.

According to Wray and Medwell (1991: 56-62) the strategies in the classroom to support the encouragement of voluntary reading centre around five key issues:

1. Choice

The development of enthusiasm and of taste depends upon the freedom to choose what is read. Various studies showed that there was a positive relationship between choice and affective aspects of reading, and that choice was a key motivator to read (Clark & Rumbold 2006: 21-22). According to Krashen (1993), learners who choose

what they read, tend to be more motivated, read more and show greater language and literacy development. The teacher can give guidance and advice such as discussion, finding out a child's interests, recommending and knowing the books well, but learners should be allowed to exercise choice in their reading matter. Reading competency increases when learners encounter a wide range of authentic reading materials. Learners will be exposed to varied genres of children's literature to help them find those that are most appealing to them. However, Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999) found that a gap between learner reading preferences and school reading resources often exists.

2. Opportunity

To develop a reading habit, learners must have the opportunity to actually read. For some learners, opportunities to engage in pleasurable reading regularly occur at home, and for these children the supportive atmosphere of a home which values books and reading is probably sufficient to ensure that they too will share these values. For others, school may give the most extended opportunity to read, so it is vital that it does actually give them that opportunity. Learners are given the opportunity to participate voluntarily in literacy activities during independent reading periods. Teachers should have a regular period of time in which learners read individually. This can indicate to the learners that the teacher values reading.

Reading by teachers and learners in the classroom can take a variety of forms. Reading programmes such as Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) started in the United States with the aim to develop the habit of reading for enjoyment. The research basis for these programmes was evidence for links between student reading for pleasure and levels of reading proficiency and educational achievement (Cruikshank 2006: 33). Some learners may not have "quiet times" at home to enjoy reading on their own, so they never read entire books in a personal way. During silent reading in school, the teacher can tell them to read silently, they can choose their own books, read for their own pleasure, reread favourite books, discuss books with their peers and friends, exchange opinions on good books to read and share their books in a number of informal ways. Sustained Silent Reading is an opportunity for in-school recreational reading. In the PIRLS 2006

(Mullin, *et al* 2007: 215) silent independent reading was assigned daily to the majority of learners (59%).

Free voluntary reading (FVR) programmes can also help to encourage pleasure reading (Machet 2000a: 19). In these programmes, children can read whatever they want. Research indicates that FVR improves reading and language skills (Olën & Machet 1997). In FVR programmes, teachers set aside time on a regular basis for learners to read. In this period they can read whatever they would like to. Krashen (2004b) found the optimal conditions for FVR programmes to succeed requires a great deal of interesting, comprehensible reading material, time (and a comfortable place) to read, and a minimum accountability (e.g. no required summaries or book reports).

Various studies showed how important reading aloud is in effective classrooms (Pressley 2006: 15). In the PIRLS 2006 (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 215) the majority of learners (54%) reported reading aloud in class at least weekly.

3. Atmosphere

Learners are sensitive to atmosphere. The atmosphere in the classroom includes both the physical and the social atmosphere. The physical environment – use of space and materials – can provide “literacy stimuli” (Rhodes & Shanklin 1993: 56-57). Literacy materials, and how they are organised in space, can demonstrate a great deal to learners about reading and writing: a classroom in which books and other reading materials are displayed in a number of places demonstrates that they are important and may be used for enjoyment and for information. The classroom collection or book corner forms an important part of the literate atmosphere in the classroom.

4. Models

The importance of demonstrations of literacy as a literacy learning environmental condition was discussed in 4.2.1. Many learners arrive in school without ever really having seen anyone immersed in reading a book. They might have demonstrations of literate behaviour from the home environment, but unless their parents happen to be enthusiastic readers, these demonstrations may not have included extended reading

for pleasure. The teacher can demonstrate this by reading in front of learners and by talking to them about their reading.

5. Sharing

The sharing of reading issues forms part of the social context of reading. Books recommended by peers can encourage learners to read them.

4.5.2.2 Classroom collections

The classroom collection forms an important part of the classroom environment. The classroom collection or book/reading corner can provide immediate access to print material and can be of great value, even more so where learners do not have that access at home. A study by Powell compared elementary school learners' use of classroom collections, and found that those children in classrooms with a well-stocked classroom library did more recreational reading (Pucci 1998: 23). The classroom collection has an important role on its own, but even more so when the school does not have a library, or access to a public library is difficult. For the classroom collection the teacher can borrow books from the public library, or ask parents or organisations for donations.

In the light of the lack of school libraries in South Africa, the role a classroom collection can play to bring learners and books together can not be emphasised enough. The *National Policy Framework for School Library Standards* (1997) gives "one classroom one library" as one model for a school "library".

Non Government Organisations like Biblionef and READ Educational Trust are doing much to establish classroom collections. Biblionef provides new books in mother tongue languages to under-resourced organisations. READ Educational Trust has donated millions of books to schools. Each class typically receives a number of high-interest books, which are sorted in a book box in the classroom (READ Educational Trust 1999).

Teachers in the PIRLS 2006 (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 229) reported that approximately two thirds of the learners (69%) had classroom libraries (averaging 52 books), and about half the learners (55%), internationally on average, could borrow books from their classroom library to take home.

4.5.2.3 Role of the teacher

Numerous researchers have documented teachers as the single most important component to learner success (Barone 2006: 79; Wray, *et al.* 2002). The teacher is the key-figure in demonstrating literacy concepts to learners: how the reading and writing processes work, what attitude adults have towards reading, what materials are available for reading and why we read (Rhodes & Shanklin 1993: 55). It is not an easy goal to create a literacy environment in which all learners are motivated and encouraged to be enthusiastic readers.

Effective teaching is a complex activity which needs not only professional skills, but also personal qualities such as imagination, creativity and sensitivity to stimulate, support and encourage reading and learning (Hart 2002: 4). Other teacher-based factors that can influence learner outcomes include teacher education, qualification, training and experience, classroom management and discipline, instructional approaches to reading, and the personality of the teacher and his attitude to learners (Pretorius & Machet 2004). Effective teaching also requires a well-organised, well-managed classroom. The teacher needs to be willing to assess the literacy environment and instruction in his classroom and to change it to help learners learn more effectively.

Many of the literacy activities in school do not reflect the functional nature of print in the environment, and literacy activities in the classroom should relate more to these. Literacy learning needs to be located within the broader context of the home and the community. When literacy is seen in its broad and complex dimension it leads to different practices in the classroom. Teachers who regard literacy narrowly (simply as the learning of reading and writing skills) will create a different classroom

environment to those created by the teacher who recognizes that literacy covers a multitude of practices (Cairney 1995: 73).

Research indicates that excellent professional development and support for teachers are key factors for effective teachers (Pressley 2006: 18). In South Africa however, this is very often not the case. Teachers in South Africa often teach in disadvantaged schools where the non-delivery of books, lack of supplementary reading materials and lack of libraries are common. Mbunyuza's research (1999: 5-12) explored teacher practices in historically disadvantaged schools and identified the following problems among teachers: lack of commitment, political ideologies (bringing party politics to schools), ineffective training and teacher practices, undesirable workloads in terms of teacher-learner ratio, lack of a supportive teaching environment and insufficient teaching aids, lack of motivation, management-related problems, and the absence of a culture of teaching.

Olën's (1996) research showed that many South African teachers have had no exposure to libraries and leisure reading in their childhood, and do not engage in voluntary reading themselves. Many primary school teachers come from communities with a strong oral culture and they are not inclined to be readers themselves, nor are they familiar with the traditions of storybook reading or books for young people (Pretorius & Machet 2004: 56). According to Alexander and Bloch (2004) many teachers did not have the chance to engage with print in their own languages, either as children, or adults, and conclude that "holding back the development of written children's literature in African languages has contributed to crippling the development of effective literacy teachers".

Many teachers might realise that reading is important, but very little attention is given to reading after Grade 4 as reading is then regarded as a leisure-time activity and free reading periods used as a homework period (Pretorius 2002: 190).

Research indicates that the most success in reading is found in classrooms where teachers routinely read to the class, where a wide range of reading materials are

available, where learners are motivated to read, and where reading is scheduled during the school day.

4.5.3 Role of the principal

Although the teacher has an important role to play in encouraging voluntary reading, the school principal is also important in terms of leadership and guidance, and creating an ethos in which reading is valued. The principal is a key person for the success of all school initiatives and activities (Dubazana & Karlsson 2006: 6; Mbunyuza 1999: 41-46). Pressley's research (2006: 7) indicated that effective principals will make a big difference by ensuring they have excellent teachers who work together to create an environment that promotes literacy and voluntary reading.

In effective schools, principals have five broad instructional and leadership areas: working with teachers, working with learners, creating a school atmosphere, providing policy leadership, and building community support (Grisham, Lapp & Flood 2000: 17). In this role, the principal has the responsibility to create a reading environment by sharing mutual concerns with teachers about the school's reading programmes, providing necessary staff development, getting involved with learners' literacy activities, and promoting awareness of the school's reading programme in the community.

The International Reading Association lists seven important aspects for the principal in his leadership role (Grisham, Lapp & Flood 2000: 21):

- The improvement of curriculum methodology and management of reading and language arts programmes;
- The application of research and theory in the refinement of reading and language arts instruction;
- The coordination and implementation of collaborative reading research;
- Attainment of resources through budget processes and grant applications;

- Development of community support for the reading and language arts programme;
- Supervision and evaluation of the classroom teacher;
- Support of professional development through provision for attendance at workshops, conferences and conventions.

Principals should take a leading role in supporting and promoting school library programmes, if the school has a library. The principal's understanding of the mission and potential of the school library, and how it can be a key factor in the success of the school's reading programmes, is of critical importance (Dubazana & Karlsson 2006: 6).

4.5.4 School library

According to the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (IFLA 2006), one of the goals of the school library is “developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading, and the use of libraries throughout their lives”.

School libraries can form an important part of the learner's literacy environment. Support from the school library could be a sure way of developing a willingness to use the library resources. Many learners may not have access to books and other reading materials at home, or access to a public library. The school library, as well as classroom collections, is then essential for encouraging reading. Krashen (1998: 12) investigated a series of studies and found that, in all studies, a positive relationship was found between a measure of the number of books in the school library and reading achievement.

Schools operate within an educational system and school legislative framework, as well as within a social community. The school library functions within an immediate school environment. Different schools have their own cultures and value systems, which explain their teaching and learning styles. School libraries can only thrive in schools whose teaching and learning styles favour them (Hart 2002: 4).

The school library has a direct relationship with the education system and can be used to reinforce basic literacy instruction by supporting curriculum and instructional goals. The school librarian can be consulted on individualised reading guidance programmes, providing library group activities, instructing learners in library skills, helping teachers appraise learner skills, conducting workshops and discussions to help parents support learner's reading and learning, and collaborating with the public library on reading programmes (Salter & Salter 1991: 61).

The classroom teacher and the school librarian should each play his unique part in helping learners discover the joy of reading. The school library is uniquely designed to support classroom activity and can be used to teach library skills, provide supplemental reading materials, reinforce teachers' programmes, and offer casual reading material for learners (Salter & Salter 1991: 61). In order to do that, a basic infrastructure, including a collection of learning resources, a place for them to be used and a school librarian to manage them, is needed. The size of the school library is also important, and to be effective, a large collection of books should be available. "For a school library programme to meet the needs of learners, ... the school must have the personnel, information sources, funds, quarters and equipment that are necessary for its successful performance" (Hart 2002: 7).

The picture of school libraries portrayed above is the ideal situation. However, a different scenario unfolds when one investigates the situation in South Africa. A survey of school libraries in the mid 1980s showed that the schools in the white sector of education had libraries perhaps equal to any in the world, whereas libraries in the African schools were virtually non-existent (Hart 2001: 2). Towards the end of the 1980s the position of school libraries began to improve in coloured and Indian schools. After 1994, these positive developments froze as budgets of the various Education Departments were consolidated into one national Department of Education. A survey done by Nxumalo (1993: 55) in Kwamashu schools identified problems such as the lack of resources, textbooks and libraries. Even if a school had a library, many schools did not even have a part-time librarian to manage the library. Full-time teachers were expected to look after it for a few periods a week. From 1996 onwards,

the government enforced national learner/teacher ratios and retrenchments of school librarian posts took place.

Internationally, according to the PIRLS study 2006, almost all learners (89%), on average, attended schools with libraries, and for many learners (71%), their school library had more than 500 books (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 229). In 1997 the Department of Education conducted a national audit of school facilities and found that less than 30% of schools had libraries at the time (Hart 2002: 13). According to the National Assessment Report (Public Ordinary Schools) (South Africa. Department of Education 2007: 39), the status of school libraries in 2006 is as follows:

Schools with no library space	Schools with library space that are reportedly not stocked	Schools with library space that are reportedly stocked
79.3%	13.5%	7.2%

Nationally only 7,2 % of South African schools now have functional school libraries. There is evidence of under-usage and lack of library resources in schools. Very few new library books have been bought in the last ten years. School libraries are unaffordable for many schools. The schools that have well-stocked libraries are, on the whole, the historically white suburban schools, who maintain them by using their own funds. In independent or private schools, 50 percent have libraries and many of the libraries in schools that fall under the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) are well equipped, have adequate annual budgets and are staffed by full-time professional librarians (Hart & Zinn 2007: 93).

School libraries in South Africa suffer from lack of policy and direction on a national and provincial level, as well as financial support. There is no understanding about what a school library is and what its programmes aim at. Without policy and direction from central government, schools are not choosing to spend their limited resources on libraries. According to Hart (2002: 14), the school library support services from the provincial services within education departments, whose job it is to develop school libraries and provide support structures, have not yet become a force and are actually “invisible”. This can be attributed to the absence of a national policy on posts for

teacher-librarians and no mechanism to oblige schools to allocate a proportion of their budgets to library materials.

On a national level in South Africa, the Department of Education is responsible for developing national school library policy and the provincial education departments must implement that policy. Since 1997, five draft policy documents on school libraries have been produced by the Department of Education, but none have, as yet, received the approval of the national Ministry of Education, despite several promising ministerial statements supporting the need for school libraries (Hart & Zinn 2007: 98). Literacy and reading policies and initiatives in South Africa have been developed over the last few years, but the implementation and rollout of these policies have not been realised properly as yet. Kwazulu-Natal is the only province with a school library policy (Hart & Zinn 2007: 95). In 2002 the department responsible for school library policy in the Department of Education was dissolved (Hart 2002: 14). Too many learners still do not have school textbooks available to them, or access to any books or reading materials for leisure reading.

In terms of the *South African Schools Act of 1996* (South Africa. Department of Education. 1997), schools each receive a budget from which they must provide for the running of their teaching and learning programmes (including school libraries). This Schools Act makes no mention of libraries (Hart & Zinn 2007: 92). Because of historical disparities, many schools still do not have school libraries, and others have very old collections of library materials which are organised by untrained teachers.

Co-operation with public libraries can augment limited resources in schools. Public librarians report that they are swamped with learners in the afternoons coming to their libraries (Hart 2002: 17). Where school libraries are scarce, the public library could fill this gap and vice versa. The ideal is that each learner should have access to both. The two are interdependent. If the school library lacks resources, the public library can assist with block-loans of suitable material. Unfortunately this is not always an option. Public libraries do not always have the resources and many schools do not have a public library nearby to make use of such an option. The absence of school libraries places increased pressure on public libraries. The School Learners and

Library Conference in 1995 suggested various models of school library service, including classroom boxes, a library shared by a cluster of schools, a joint-use community/school library, the centralised school library and the virtual library offering access to global information networks (Hart & Zinn 2007: 98).

The classroom teacher and the school librarian each play a unique part in helping learners discover the joy of reading. In order for school libraries to play a role in learners' literacy environment to support voluntary reading, the issue of school libraries needs urgent attention.

Few schools in South Africa have their own library. This places more responsibility on the shoulders of the other role players in the learner's literacy environment in supporting the learner to gain access to books in order to encourage voluntary reading.

In order for the school environment to support voluntary reading, all levels of the education system hierarchy should be involved – teachers, principals, departmental advisors and the provincial and national stakeholders – as well as parents. All these components are interdependent. The ultimate goal for the literacy environment at school is still to have a school library with a large number of books and other media, as well as classroom settings where teachers and learners talk and tell stories to each other, read and write, and share reading experiences with one another. Literate environments in school thus involve the building of classroom collections full of books and other print materials, as well as well-stocked school libraries where children are encouraged to both browse and read - situations inviting learners to read and write.

Pressley's study (2006: 5) on effective classrooms, effective schools and entire literacy programmes in a large school with high test scores in effective reading, showed that, at the centre of the curriculum, is a lot of reading, with learners experiencing many books and reading opportunities.

4.6 PUBLIC/COMMUNITY LIBRARY AS AGENT OF LITERACY

Literacy is dependent on the availability of print materials. Libraries have “a major educational responsibility as well as unique services and resources to contribute to the development and maintenance of lifelong literacy skills and knowledge” (Salter & Salter 1991: 53).

4.6.1 Public library as part of the literacy environment

One of the best ways to encourage learners to read is access to enjoyable and suitable books and reading materials. Public libraries are the only potentially constant source of a supply of books which can also provide an environment in which to enjoy reading (Elkin & Lonsdale 1996: 85). According to the IFLA Guidelines for children’s library services, “by providing a wide range of materials and activities, public libraries provide an opportunity for children to experience the enjoyment of reading ...” (IFLA 2003: 3).

Weibel (1992: 4-5) speaks of the library as a literacy classroom, using classroom in its broader sense: as a place where learning occurs, or as a place that fosters reading. In this literacy classroom, the librarian is an educator in the broader sense of professionals who prepare a rich environment for learners, introduce the learners to the varied collections of reading materials available to them, and help them find and use materials that are particularly appropriate to each learner’s needs and interests.

Libraries and literacy thus go together in a manner similar to schools and literacy. Formal education is mainly the responsibility of the school, but public libraries are an important supplement to the learner’s literacy encounters for example, children consult reference works and other material for school projects, they seek information about hobbies and other interests, they find supplementary material on specific subjects, they find books for leisure reading, and they use the library as a study place, often due to inadequate or unsuitable facilities at home. Librarians can play a key role in enhancing children’s interest in reading for pleasure and a love for reading.

The 21st century library, in seeking to serve an information society, has changed drastically. A paradigm shift is placing greater responsibility on libraries to be involved with the needs of their communities (Andersen 2002). In South Africa, in terms of literacy, this can take the form of adult literacy, family literacy, story hours and cooperation with schools and other educational institutions. It is important for the library to develop and maintain a literate population if they are to survive.

The library supplies a service that no other agency could easily provide (Andersen 2002; Elkin & Lonsdale 1995; Salter & Salter 1991). The role of librarians is to play an active part in mobilising new readers and sustaining their interest. They can introduce books to learners and encourage them to read for various purposes. If children feel at home in the library, there is the potential that it will become an important part of their lives.

As part of the literacy environment libraries need the services, skills, attitudes, organisational structures, and resources to provide quality library service to children, their parents and the community (Immroth & Ash-Geisler 1995: 140-146).

1. Services

Libraries can encourage children to develop an interest in reading through special services and programmes for children, for parents and children together, and by educating parents on how to support their children's reading.

A variety of activities can attract people to the library. Such programmes may take place in the library (for example story hours), or the library may reach out to institutions such as schools and facilities, such as childcare centres. The library can cooperate with family literacy programmes and other community programmes that serve children in community locations.

2. Attitudes and skills of staff

Qualified librarians are skilled professionals who know their collections and can link books and readers by advising and guiding them. Besides having professional

knowledge and skills, the staff in the library require the personal qualities of empathy with children and confidence in relating with them in order to support learners to become voluntary readers. This includes:

- an understanding of child development, including intellectual, emotional, physical, behavioural, language and social development;
- a detailed knowledge of children's books and related materials;
- knowledge of educational trends and developments;
- familiarity with contemporary child culture and storytelling, performance, public speaking, teaching and promotional skills (Elkin & Lonsdale 1996: 70).

There is a problem in South Africa as so few library schools are teaching children's or school librarianship because there are no jobs (Hart & Zinn 2007: 95).

The role of the librarian is to ensure that all children have access to books and other materials – regardless of their age, socio-economic status, health, gender or population group – and to promote reading, and to bring the child and the right book together (Elkin & Lonsdale 1996: 66).

A friendly and understanding attitude of staff shows that the public library is an inviting, supporting and encouraging place in which to get involved in reading activities. Children's librarians, like other professionals, should ensure they keep up-to-date with current developments and trends in their profession.

3. Organisational structures

To support children in becoming voluntary readers requires organisational structures within individual libraries as well as the broader library community. To establish organisational structures, the following are needed (Immroth & Ash-Geisler 1995: 143-145):

- library policies which includes children's services as a priority;
- children's librarians,
- facilities and space for children's collections, programmes and activities;

- communication between librarians, the early care and education community, and other role players.

4. Resources

The goal of developing and maintaining a reading population requires access to a variety of materials. Voluntary reading and the availability of appropriate reading materials go hand in hand. Library resources are the basis for the delivery of service. Libraries provide access to information as well as materials that are recreational or cultural. Resources must include a variety of materials on different levels and formats to accommodate diversity in age, reading skills and abilities. Cultural and language heritages should also be taken into account. Professional materials for librarians and the education community as well as materials suitable for parents to help them support learners in developing reading can be part of the library's resources.

The library can provide a far wider range of materials and wider choice of titles than home or school can. An important issue to be addressed here is funding.

4.6.2 Public libraries in South Africa

In developing countries like South Africa voluntary reading is often restricted by the limited number of libraries (KaiKai & KaiKai 1992: 110). Under the previous system of apartheid, library provision in South Africa in the black townships, informal settlements and rural communities was less favourable than that for white urban areas. Public libraries are still mainly serving the educated and urban middle class, which is a small minority (less than 10%) of the population (Witbooi 2007: 65). A research project by the Centre for the Book found that the number of libraries per province is not proportional to the size of the population, for example, in 2004 the most populous province, KwaZulu-Natal, had fewer libraries (164) than two other provinces, namely Gauteng (516) and the Western Cape (307). This report also shows how the number of libraries in some provinces has decreased. (Witbooi 2007: 64-67).

Access to libraries is another problem. A study by Powell found that learners who lived closer the library tended to use the public library the most (Pucci 1998: 23). In

the developing world, the few existing libraries are located in the urban centres, far out of reach of the majority of the population. In South Africa 85% of the population lives beyond the reach of a public library (Williams 2006: 46). Many learners do not have transport to reach libraries, or it is expensive. The National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans found that access to libraries and mobile libraries is an issue, especially in rural communities (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007).

Social conditions also impact negatively on South African public libraries. Lockyer-Benzie, as quoted by Stilwell (2006: 8), identified social conditions that can impact on library usage: information literacy, access to new technologies, adult literacy, multiculturalism, indigenous communities, ageing, poverty, unemployment, transport, geographical location, homelessness, social isolation, disabilities, community ownership and participation, safety and security, and other potential barriers such as policy, operational issues and physical access. In areas where many of these conditions prevail, public library services are either non-existent, or of poor quality (Witbooi 2007: 66-67).

The last decade has witnessed a general deterioration in public library services due to financial constraints (Leach 2006: 131; Tise 2000: 57). The lack of adequate private and public financial support for establishing and maintaining libraries limits the availability of reading materials, number of libraries and staffing.

Many libraries in South Africa are not used for their reading materials and resources, but merely as study centres.

Public/community libraries, as well as school libraries, should play a central role in ensuring access to books and other print material. They also may initiate programmes of story reading, book clubs and so on to encourage participation and engagement in reading. By making books available, together with staff to make them accessible through advice and assistance in choosing and using them, libraries can make a unique contribution to the encouragement of reading, and the promotion of reading

habits and positive attitudes towards reading. For children from disadvantaged communities, libraries might be their only opportunity to have easy access to books.

4.7 THE ROLE OF THE LEARNER'S COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTARY READING

The manifestations of literacy outside the family and classroom in the community and society are just as important as the literate environment in the home and school is in promoting reading. The relationship between the family, the school and the wider society is important. Learners must have access to books and reading materials in the community at large. The IEA study (Elley 1992: 83) found that, in some countries without a ready supply of books at home a great deal of reading was still done. One of the reasons for this was that it was found that several of these countries have large school and community libraries and abundant reading resources in the community. Support from the community can thus make up for a lack of resources at home.

Certain characteristics of a community support the success and achievements of the individuals within it. One of the characteristics is that of "high cohesion" (Fisher 1995: 139), which is the sense of belonging, of shared purpose and support within a group. This can be valuable in the promotion of reading when a learner feels he belongs to a reading population, and gets support from the community in reading practices.

Literacy campaigns are more successful when they can depend on commitment and enthusiasm generated by the community. To promote literacy, public awareness in the community is necessary. According to Hamadache and Martin (1986: 26) public awareness can be fostered in many ways through interviews and seminars, conferences, and discussions for public information; through the media (radio, cinema, television, the press); through the channels provided by non-governmental and other organisations; in cultural activities (the theatre, popular songs); and through the responsiveness of the formal education system to literacy work.

It is important to create a range of opportunities to read for the learner in order to encourage voluntary reading. The many projects (Abel 2001; McMurray 2004a; McMurray 2004b; Read Educational Trust 2006) undertaken to promote literacy and a reading habit in South Africa indicate a growing awareness in this country of the importance of reading.

NGOs like Read Educational Trust, Room to Read, the Molteno project, Project Literacy, Booksmart, Media in Education Trust (MieT) and PRAESA target literacy.

In order to become readers, learners must have role models in the community to inspire or motivate them to read. In many townships community problems pose serious obstacles to reading and contribute to social disintegration – for example, squatters, violence, corruption, crime, theft, destruction of school equipment and political intolerance (Nxumalo 1993: 58). Some community members do not respect the schools. Another problem is often the lack of resources in the schools and the township as a whole.

The publishing industry form part of the literacy environment. South Africans are, in general, not book buyers. There are no official statistics available on this issue, but according to Jaco Nel (Nel 2008), Fanatics Marketing Manager of Exclusive Books, the Fanatics database is 600 000, although not all of them are active book buyers. There are other people who are customers of bookshops in South Africa, but the number of committed readers can only be estimated.

The IEA study (Elley 1992: 67) found that the availability of nearby bookstores in the community is another aspect affecting learners' accessibility to books. Nearly all bookshops in Africa are in urban areas, sometimes hundred of miles apart (Land 2003: 94). A study done by IBBY SA (2006) on bookshops and children's books indicted that bookshops do very little to promote children's and young people's books.

Another problem is the limited number of books published in the indigenous languages. It is difficult to encourage learners to read for pleasure if there are few

books for children to read in their home language and that reflect their culture, values and language (Machet 2000b: 6-7). Most books published are for educational purposes and not to encourage reading for pleasure. In Africa, 95% of books published are for educational purposes (compared to 35% in the developed world) (Wafawarowa 2000: 15). There is also a lack of nationally and regionally published materials (Land 2003: 94).

Apart from the local community and society, education, literacy and the promotion of reading should also get attention in policymaking, planning and developing literacy programmes on a national level. This will place emphasis on literacy in a country. Ahmed (1992: 34) underlines the role the government has to play in creating a national literacy learning environment in which all sectors of society can participate. Basic education, literacy, post-literacy learning and early childhood education should share in the total national education budget. In South Africa this is not always the case, as discussed. Additional resources are needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of basic education and literacy learning. Ways of mobilising non-governmental resources have to be considered.

4.8 CONCLUSION

It is clear that voluntary reading is affected by family life, the school environment, social and economic conditions in the community, and a complex of other environmental factors. If we want learners to become voluntary readers, and thus develop a reading habit, we need insight into the ways that the entire literacy environment can support this development.

The individual, group, community and society, as part of the learner's environment, have an important role in shaping reading attitudes and motivation. The group, community and society should set examples, provide opportunities and strengthen the perception that literacy is important.

It is the responsibility of parents and institutions, such as the school and library, to give every child a chance to make the most of his reading potential by intentionally

creating reading environments. Research shows that the most important ways to support voluntary reading and the acquisition of literacy are to increase the number of books and reading materials and opportunities for reading in the home and classroom. Motivation to read at school and home is also important in fostering reading success for all children.

Chapter 5 will deal with the research methodology used in this research.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The concern about literacy and the lack of a functional literate population in South Africa is well documented. The hypothesis being tested in this research is that in order to develop a reading habit and to become engaged in voluntary reading, learners need support and encouragement from teachers, parents and others in their literacy environment and they also need to have access to appropriate reading materials. The literature survey indicates that the literacy environment in South Africa may not be conducive to the establishment of a reading culture.

The main focus and purpose of the empirical investigation is to establish if Grade 3 - 7 learners obtain the necessary support and encouragement from their literacy environment to develop a reading habit and engage in voluntary reading. The literature study investigated several aspects of literacy, motivation to read, attitudes towards reading, voluntary reading and the literacy environment in Chapters Two to Four. This provides a theoretical framework for the empirical research and indicated what key areas need to be included in the questionnaire. In this chapter the research methodology will be discussed. Participation in the research, the population sample used, the research design and the collection of the data are addressed.

5.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used is a case study. The case study research method is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Soy 1997: 1). In a case study a limited number of units of analysis, such as a certain group, are studied intensively. In case studies, one is directed towards understanding the uniqueness of a particular case in all its complexity. A case study emphasizes detailed contextual analysis of a limited

number of events or conditions and their relationships. The researcher investigates the object of the case study in depth to produce evidence that leads to understanding of the case and answers the research questions. The chief purpose of a case study can be descriptive or the in-depth study of a particular case can yield explanatory insights (Babbie 2005: 306).

In this case study the focus is on a certain group of people – learners in Grades 3 to 7 in urban and metropolitan areas – and the literacy environment (home, school and community) that supports their acquisition of literacy and the development of voluntary reading. This case study was limited to schools in the Highveld Ridge and East Gauteng area. Rural areas are not included because of budgetary and logistical constraints. The limitation of attention to a particular instance of something is the essential characteristic of the case study (Babbie 2005: 306).

In a case study findings cannot be generalised to all other subjects of the same type, but the case study findings will give insight into the issue.

The methodology used is survey research. For this study the researcher follows a deductive approach. According to Neumann (2000: 250) a deductive approach is one where the researcher begins with a theoretical research problem and ending with empirical measurement and data analysis. Research is used to test theories. Survey researchers sample many respondents who answer the same questions. An association among variables is measured with statistical techniques.

5.2.1 Literature survey

A theoretical basis for the research was provided by a literature survey that was done to investigate and describe the various aspects of literacy, voluntary reading and the literacy environment to provide a theoretical basis for the research. This theoretical basis defines the relevant concepts, and provides the conceptual framework within which the relevant phenomena are systemised and classified, and the relations between them identified.

In Chapter 2 various aspects of literacy are investigated, such as defining literacy, literacy practices and modern society, levels of literacy, the cultural and social foundation of literacy, literacy skills, the value of literacy, language and literacy and literacy in South Africa. Literacy is at the heart of education and mastering literacy is the first step towards developing a reading habit. In order to establish if learners get support from their literacy environment, the researcher needs to establish which issues can impact on literacy development and the development of a reading habit.

Chapter 3 investigates the concept of voluntary reading. A positive attitude towards reading and motivation to read are two major factors in the development of voluntary reading and a reading habit.

Chapter 4 deals with literacy environment as a whole and includes environmental factors such as the home and school literacy environment, as well as the role of libraries, the community and society in supporting voluntary reading. These four environments form the literacy environment of the learner and the individual and the role and contribution of each to voluntary reading needs to be investigated and understood.

The literature survey comprised a thorough review of the available research on the research topic. This information was used to help identify variables and to formulate the questionnaires to ensure insightful and relevant questions about the problem were asked.

5.2.2. Empirical survey

The hypothesis being tested in this research is that in order to develop a reading habit and to become engaged in voluntary reading, learners need

- i) support and encouragement from teachers, parents and others in their literacy environment and
- ii) they should also have access to appropriate reading materials.

The research question addressed in this study is:

Does the literacy environment at home, in school and in the community support the development of literacy and voluntary reading among young learners?

Sub-problems derived from the research question are:

- What factors in the environment support literacy and voluntary reading?
- To what extent is voluntary reading present in the sample group?
- What kind of literacy environment does the home provide?
- What kind of literacy environment do the schools provide?
- What access to libraries do learners have?
- To what extent do they make use of libraries?
- Do they have access to reading materials?
- Do they read on their own?

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in order to validate and confirm research findings. The distinction between quantitative and qualitative data is essentially the distinction between numerical and non-numerical data (Babbie 2007: 23). Most of the questions are closed, but a few open-ended questions are asked to get opinions and views.

The empirical survey is mainly quantitative research. In the quantitative method predetermined categories and a more structured scientific approach are involved. The quantitative survey is a widely used technology for social research (Neuman 2000: 250). Quantification (the process of converting data to numerical form) makes statistical analyses possible and it is easier to compare and summarize data. The level of measurement is nominal. A nominal level of measurement involves allocating numerals to variables so that they can be identified, named or labelled. The numerical system used for a nominal level measurement is adequate if it contains three characteristics, namely

- Exhaustive: All possible values or categories are provided as response to the question;
- Mutually exclusive: All responses must fall within one and only one category or value as answer to the question;
- Each category that represents the variable as a subclass must be labelled with a different numeral, so that the categories or subclasses can be differentiated (Du Plooy 2002: 118-119).

The quantitative approach is characterised by

- Attention to a limited number of variables and constants which are important to the researcher and which are usually expressed in the language of his own investigation;
- A search for the significance of relative proportions, in order to identify what is more important and what is less so in the issue which the researcher is exploring;
- An attempt to understand the ways in which selected factors in a situation are structured or interrelated (Jankowicz 1999: 174).

Open-ended questions were also asked in the questionnaires for teachers and headmasters which did not require a standardised answer. The purpose of these is to discover opinions and add depth to the quantitative data and increase understanding of the situation.

This research is cross-sectional, as it observes at one point in time.

In order to enrich findings and provide multiple perspectives learners, teachers and school principles completed a questionnaire. A survey was conducted among headmasters and teachers to elicit information regarding their support for learners in becoming voluntary readers. This was done because the literature indicates that they play an important role in helping learners develop a reading habit. Learners were interviewed in order to find out about their reading habits and literacy environments.

A sample of respondents from each group was selected to complete a questionnaire. One hundred and seventy learners were interviewed, fifty teachers and twenty-two headmasters completed the questionnaires. In a purposive sample, the sample size will be determined by the feeling that the researcher has approached all the relevant respondents (Jankowicz 1999: 164). The size of the sample is frequently determined as much by the practical concerns of the researcher as well as by analytic ones (McIntyre 2005: 108). An analytic concern is that the more diverse the population, the larger the sample must be to capture diversity. Most researchers have limited resources in terms of time and money. For this reason, most decisions about sampling size reflect a compromise between analytic and practical concerns. One final factor should be taken into account when deciding on sample size, and that is the nature of the study and the number of variables that is included (McIntyre 2005: 108). The more variables that are of interest, the larger the sample needs to be.

The accuracy of results depends much more on the variety of different groups and subgroups in the population, and how much time and effort one can afford to spend, rather than on size.

5.3 PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

After submitting the research proposal and research details to the Department of Education, permission to visit schools and conduct the study was obtained from Dr Mathunyane at the DOE regional office in Evander and Gugu Mgcobo from the DOE Kyalami District N6 regional office in Kempton Park.

A case study was done on the schools in the Highveld Ridge and East Gauteng area. Lists of schools in these areas were obtained from the Department of Education and any twenty-two schools were chosen. Every fifth name on the list was chosen. School principals were approached and asked to participate in the study. The purpose and methodology were explained to them.

5.4 ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues need to be addressed when doing research. A major ethical issue in research is that it brings no harm (physical harm, psychological harm, legal harm, or harm to a person's career or income) to research objects (Babbie 2005; Neuman 2000). In this study the purpose of the questionnaire was explained to the learners and it was emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers.

Another basic ethical rule is voluntary participation (Babbie 2005; Neuman 2000). Participation in this study was voluntary. Respondents agreed to answer questions voluntarily and could refuse to participate at any time. All participants gave informed consent to participate in the research. An information sheet, explaining the purpose of the questionnaire as well as what the respondent was expected to do, was given to learners who participated (Appendix E).

A letter of consent to participate was given to learners (Appendixes F).

Anonymity and confidentiality are two important ethical issues (Babbie 2005; Neuman 2000). Participants were assured that the answers to the questionnaire would be kept confidential and they were therefore encouraged to answer as honestly as possible. They were also assured of anonymity. On the questionnaires for learners and teachers no names appear so that their identity is protected (Appendixes A and B). On the questionnaire for headmasters the name of the school is asked, but it is guaranteed that information will be treated as confidential. (See Appendix C).

All guarantees of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were honoured.

5.5 POPULATION SAMPLE

The population is the total collection of units to be studied. As the whole population cannot be studied, a sample from this population is drawn. The population from which the sample was drawn is primary school learners in the middle and upper primary

school years – Grades 3 - 7. The unit of analysis is the element about which you are observing and collecting data (Nardi 2003: 98) and in this case is a learner in the above-mentioned category. Teachers and headmasters were also questioned as a mechanism to collect additional information about the unit of analysis studied in the research.

In a case study the sampling process is purposive rather than random. Sometimes there is a specific reason to choose a sample, because of some characteristics of the units of analysis. Purposive sampling is one kind of non-probability sampling. In this type of sampling the researcher selects cases that will provide contrasting experiences and because they meet the criteria of age and grade. In a non-probability sample the information gathered can only be used to describe, explain or predict information about those who completed the survey, that is, those who are part of the sample (Nardi 2003: 99).

Drawing a non-probability sample means that

- Every unit in the population does not have an equal and therefore probable chance of being selected as part of the sample, implying that the sample will not necessarily have the same parameters as the population;
- In most cases the researcher controls the choice of units of analysis;
- A sampling frame cannot be compiled;
- Every possible combination of units cannot be drawn from the sampling frame;
- The sample is not representative of the target population and therefore has no external validity (Du Plooy 2002: 113).

Primary school learners in the middle and upper primary school years – Grades 3 - 7 – were chosen because in the middle elementary grades and in the upper primary school the focus shifts from learning the skills and concepts of literacy (learning to read and write) to comprehension (reading and writing to learn).

Based on educational achievements and practices, Chall (1983: 15-23) distinguishes between three reading stages in the primary school years:

- Stage 1: Initial reading, or decoding (Grades 1 - 2, ages 6 - 7). The essential aspect of this stage is learning the arbitrary set of letters and associating these with the corresponding parts of spoken words. Learners read very simple stories.
- Stage 2: More fluent reading (Grades 2 - 3, ages 7 - 8). They use decoding to figure out new words and pay more attention to meaning of what is read.
- Stage 3: Reading to “learn the new” – new knowledge, information, thoughts and experiences, for example from readers, subject textbooks, reference works (Grades 4 - 7, ages 9 - 13).

Lohann (1986) and Machet and Pretorius (2003) distinguish between two developmental phases in the primary school years:

Lohann describes the first stage as the beginning reading phase: Six to eight years. Machet and Pretorius call stage 1 the reading instruction stage (Grades 1 - 3). In these first years learners learn to read and write and this forms the basis for further learning and reading. The main focus is learning the technical skill of coding and decoding.

Lohann describes the second phase as the middle reading phase: Nine to twelve years. Machet and Pretorius call stage 2 the transitional stage (Grades 4 - 7). In this phase the learners become independent readers. The focus is on reading with meaning. Learners start using textbooks. In this study the focus is on the second stage. This group should already be on the way to developing a reading habit.

According to Chall (1983: 26-29) the reading stage theory has different values. Reading stages can contribute to a better understanding of how reading is acquired and how the literacy environment may be optimised for learners at the different stages. The stages can lead to systematic study of the environments in school and at home that foster reading development.

The lower grades comprise a developmental phase of the learner which is decisive for the development of various abilities and characteristics. At this stage of their school

career this age group should have mastered basic reading and writing skills, although the process of reading functionally is still in progress.

Experience of schooling can be formative of attitudes as, for example, national surveys undertaken in Britain by the Assessment and Performance Unit (APU) have shown. The APU conducted surveys between 1979 and 1983, using 1200 learners to answer questions relating to their perceptions of reading and writing. The findings were that the patterns of response established at age 11 not only influence outcomes at age 15, but are likely to be in evidence from the earliest school years (Marum 1996: 143).

All the above-mentioned statements and findings indicate the suitability of this group for this particular research project. If it becomes clear that learners of this age group are not developing a reading habit, it is still early enough to put measures in place to rectify this.

Reading can become a habit if children learn from an early age to use books and other resources both for information and for pleasure (Machet & Pretorius 2003). It is therefore in the primary school that the foundation of independent reading must be laid and positive attitudes towards reading for pleasure developed.

The literature study has clearly shown that a person's success in reading depends largely on the experiences with literature and reading that take place during the early years in school. A child's first five years of reading forms the basis for further reading.

One-hundred-and-seventy learners were interviewed. Three learners were chosen from a class. Any name on the class list was chosen – one from the top of the class list, one in the middle and one towards the end. The principals in all schools assured the researcher that classes were not graded according to ability. The researcher interviewed most of the learners. Two teachers and two field workers assisted with the interviews of the learners. The researcher did a basic training session with the interviewers. They only had to mark the learner's response on the questionnaire. The

teachers were not the class teacher of the learners interviewed, so that the learners could answer honestly without feeling intimidated. The purpose and procedure were explained to the interviewers by the researcher. The questionnaires were structured and all the questions in the questionnaire for learners were closed questions with given answers as options.

No problems were encountered in terms of language. The questionnaires were in English, but questions were explained to non-English mother tongue learners. The interviewer had a general conversation in English with respondents before the questionnaire was filled in, to determine if they could answer questions in English. All the children interviewed could hold a conversation in English and it was explained to them what the questionnaires were about. Respondents were competent to answer and to provide information in English. Most learners – black and white – in the urban areas receive tuition in English from Grade 4 onwards and understood English sufficiently well to answer the questions.

Urban and township schools from various socio-economic areas and language and cultural backgrounds were chosen in order to get a perspective from various backgrounds on literacy practices. Eleven headmasters of schools from the Highveld Ridge/Secunda area and eleven from the East Gauteng area completed questionnaires. People in these areas range from above average income to the poorest and they live in diverse circumstances. Different school environments (three private schools and nineteen public schools) were used in the survey. The questionnaires for the teachers and headmasters were self-administered. The nature of the survey was explained to headmasters and teachers as well, and reassurance that their responses will be anonymous or kept confidential given.

5.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND COLLECTION OF DATA

The purpose of this empirical survey is to investigate the literacy environment and how it supports the development of literacy and a reading habit. The research design links the research question to the execution of the research. To collect primary data, interviewer-administered questionnaires are used to record the responses needed.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, as they can strengthen one another.

5.6.1 Questionnaires

The survey instrument used to collect data was questionnaires. Based on the literature survey, variables identified as significant were identified and questions were formulated to gather relevant information on the literacy environment. The literacy environment was assessed via the learners', teachers' and headmasters' questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to assess a wide range of elements of the literacy environment identified as relevant through the literature survey (for example, access to reading materials, reading habits, library use).

Questionnaires comprising open-ended and closed questions were used for the principals and teacher questionnaires.

All the questions in the questionnaire for learners were closed questions. In this survey questionnaire the respondent was asked to select an answer from among a list provided by the researcher. This provided a greater uniformity of responses and was more easily processed than open-ended questions. Intensity scales were not used, as the respondents were children who might not be able to distinguish between answers like "strongly agree", or "somewhat disagree". Some questions were contingency questions where certain questions are relevant to some of the respondents and irrelevant to others. Whether it was to be answered was contingent on responses to the first question in the series. The answers to the closed questions were analysed statistically (using the SPSS statistics programme).

The questionnaires for teachers and headmasters had open-ended questions in order to obtain additional information on opinions, views and ideas. These open-ended questions addressed issues relating to activities to encourage reading and aspects of the home environment that may have a negative impact on literacy. An analysis of the answers of the open-ended questions will be given. Careful consideration was given to the construction of the questions in order to keep them unambiguous,

relevant and simple. A pilot project in the Highveld Ridge TLC area was carried out prior to the main study to identify problems in this regard. As a result of this pilot project, revisions and improvements were made in the phrasing of questions and the overall structure of the questionnaires. After small amendments, the questionnaire was administered individually.

Introductory comments and clear instructions for completing the questionnaire were given. Respondents were to indicate the answer by an X in the box beside the appropriate answer or by writing in their answer when asked to do so. Respondents were informed that their answers would be anonymous (no names or identification numbers are given that might be linked to particular respondents) and confidential (names or numbers are given, but the responses will not be connected to particular respondents and names of respondents will not be revealed).

The questionnaires were coded individually and then analysed statistically.

The questionnaires were evaluated by Dr Rhena Muller and Mr Hennie Gerber in the Department of Statistics at UNISA. Mr Gerber and Mrs Heleen Muller also assisted with the SPSS analysis of the questionnaires.

Three questionnaires served as survey instrument:

1. Learners' questionnaire
2. Teachers' questionnaire.
3. Headmasters' questionnaire

5.6.1.1 Learners' questionnaire

The learners did not complete the questionnaires on their own. Teachers, the researcher and field workers acted as interviewers for learners. These face-to-face structured interviews take more time than self-administered questionnaires, often resulting in smaller sample sizes.

The questionnaire for learners was done as a structured interview. These take place face-to-face. The questions were kept short and simple for clarity, because lengthy

questions could confuse the young respondents. An interviewer read the questions to the learners and the interviewer put a cross in the block of the learner's choice. Respondents were given information and instructions on completing the questionnaires. All respondents received a bookmark as token of appreciation after completing the questionnaire.

The learners' questionnaire (See Appendix A) was divided into:

1. Background/biographical information (Questions 1 - 4) – age, gender, population group and home language as variables.
2. Information on the learners' home literacy environment (Questions 5 - 17). Questions 5 - 9 describe the home environment – electricity, listening to a radio, watching television, computer availability, and the caregiver of the child. Questions 10 - 17 deal with the literacy environment at home – story reading and story telling and who is involved, availability of books and other reading materials, number of books and types of books. These questions were included as the literature indicates that the family structure, the family's social standing, literacy, reading activities and attitudes will affect the child's development of a reading habit.
3. School literacy environment (Questions 18 - 23) – school grade, tuition language, reading activities, parental involvement in school matters as variables.
4. Involvement in literacy activities, access to reading materials as well as library membership (Questions 24 - 35).

5.6.1.2 Teachers' questionnaire

Fifty teachers completed the teachers' questionnaire. Grade 3 - 7 teachers were chosen from names given by the headmaster. From the list of teachers given, one was chosen from the first half of the list and one from the second half at each school.

The teacher's questionnaire (See appendix B) comprised three sections:

1. Background/biographical information, with gender, home language, teacher training and experience, library use, reading habits as variables.
2. School environment, with number of learners per class, tuition language, classroom conditions, meetings with parents as variables.

3. School literacy environment, with parental involvement, reading corners, classroom collections, story reading, class reading as variables, as well as open-ended questions on specific reading activities and aspects of the home environment that have been identified in the literature survey as hindering reading development.

5.6.1.3 Headmasters' questionnaire

Headmasters of 22 schools (See Appendix C) completed the headmasters' questionnaire.

The headmasters' questionnaire included two sections:

1. The school environment in general, with type of school (public or private), mother tongue of the majority learners in the school, tuition language, classroom shortages, meetings with parents as variables.
2. The literacy environment in the school, with the existence of a school library, full time school librarian, part time school librarian, library use as variables, as well as open-ended questions on specific activities to encourage reading.

The headmasters' and teachers' questionnaires were used to provide information on the literacy environment that the school provides, and on the teachers' literacy practices and perceptions.

The purpose of each of the questions will be discussed when analysing the questionnaires.

5.6.2 Analysis of data

Two types of data were analysed: closed and open-ended questions.

- The quantitative/closed questions were encoded by allocating numbers and the data were entered into the computer. Some questions had a "yes/no" answer, others had a choice between different options. Data, once organised into

categories, was coded and captured. The frequency distribution – the number of times the various attributes of a variable are observed – is given in percentages. Percentages are rounded off the first digit after the decimal point and do not necessarily add up to 100 percent. The quantitative analysis was done by the computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Pallant 2005). Coding was done on the questionnaire itself and then entered into the SPSS data matrix. Code categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Every piece of information being coded fits into one and only one category (Babbie 2005: 418).

- The purpose of the qualitative analysis is to discover underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie 2005: 387). The open questions required in-depth content analysis. Content analysis involves looking for recurring themes, key ideas, keywords in context, words, word repetition, or phrases. For these questions the responses were processed and categorised in order to organise and analyse them. A list of categories to summarise answers and their frequency were determined by the responses to questions. A problem of qualitative research is that it is done chiefly with words and not with numbers as in quantitative research (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2005: 213). All respondents' answers to a certain question were read and each time a new answer was encountered it was recorded, as was the frequency of each answer category. The categorisation was done by the researcher herself.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be done to assess differences between groups.

5.7 CONCLUSION

From the literature it is obvious that there are many role players and environmental factors that could have an effect on learner's literacy practices and reading habit development. The different variables which may influence learner's engagement in voluntary reading have been identified and investigated in the survey.

Chapter 6 will deal with the empirical research where learners' engagement in reading will be investigated. The sample group must indicate if and what inputs and motivation they get from their literacy environment. The data of the empirical survey is analysed and discussed.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters dealt with the literature study and the research methodology. In this chapter the data gathered in the empirical study is analysed and discussed in the light of the research question:

Does the literacy environment at home, in school and in the community support the development of literacy and voluntary reading among young learners?

Data were gathered by means of the three different questionnaires – learners', teachers' and headmasters' questionnaires.

The survey population from which the sample was drawn is primary school learners in the middle and upper primary school years – Grades 3 -7. Motivation for choosing this sample was discussed in Chapter 5.5. Teachers and headmasters were also questioned to collect additional information about the learners. Urban and suburban schools from various socio-economic areas and language and cultural backgrounds were chosen in order to get a perspective from various backgrounds on literacy practices. Different school environments (three private schools and nineteen public schools) were used in the survey.

6.2 LEARNERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

One-hundred-and-seventy learners completed the learners' questionnaire (refer to Appendix A for an example of the questionnaire).

The questionnaire is divided as follows:

- Questions 1 - 4 are on personal information,
- Questions 5 - 16 on the home environment,
- Questions 17 - 21 on the school environment,
- Questions 22 and 23 on their library environment and
- Questions 24 - 32 on the respondents' own reading environment and literacy practices.

6.2.1 Questions 1-4: Personal/biographical information

The first section was aimed at obtaining personal information about each learner and included the learner's age, gender, population group and home language.

Q 1. Age of learners in the sample

Age of learner	N	%
9 years	73	42,9
10 years	61	35,9
11 years	33	19,4
12 years	3	1,8
Total	170	100

Q 2. Gender of learners in the sample

Gender	N	%
Boy	88	51,7
Girl	82	48,3
Total	170	100

Q 3. Racial group of learners

Racial group	N	%
Black	99	58,3
White	57	33,5
So-called "Coloured"	6	3,5
Asian	8	4,7
Total	170	100

Q 4. Home language of learners

Home language	N	%
English	17	10
Afrikaans	49	28,8
Zulu	47	27,6
Tswana	11	6,5
Southern Sotho	12	7,1
Xhosa	6	3,5
Other	23	13,5
More than one	5	2,9
Total	170	100

The age of the population sample was 9-12 years. The majority of respondents are in the age groups 9 (42,9%) and 10 (35,9%). They are in their middle/transitional reading phase and should have mastered the basic reading skills. This is the phase in which they should become more fluent and independent readers.

The sample consisted of approximately equal numbers of boys and girls (51,7% boys, 48,3% girls). The results of this study will thus be representative of both genders in this age group.

This study included learners from various racial groups (Black 58,3%; White 33,5%, so-called “Coloured” 3,5% and Asian 4,7%). National statistics of the various racial groups in South Africa are: Black 79,6%, White 9,1%, Coloured 8,9% and Asian 2,5% (*Stats in brief* 2007: 12). The sample in this case study is therefore not representative of the general population in South Africa.

From the literature study (Chapter 2.4) it was clear how important the relationship is between home language and tuition language. Only 10% of the respondents indicated that English is their home language.

6.2.2 Questions 5-16: Home environment

The literature survey has shown how important the home environment can be to motivate children to get engaged in reading activities. This section investigates the home environment of the sample group.

6.2.2.1 Questions 5-9: Home conditions

It has been argued that the physical environment, the family structure, the family's literacy and reading activities and attitudes will affect the learner's development of a reading habit.

Q 5. Electricity at home

Electricity	N	%
Yes	162	95,3
No	8	4,7
Total	170	100

Q 6. Listen to a radio

Radio listening	N	%
Yes	150	88,2
No	20	11,8
Total	170	100

Q 7. Television watching

TV watching	N	%
Yes	162	95,3
No	8	4,7
Total	170	100

Q 8. Computer at home

Computer at home	N	%
Yes	60	35,3
No	110	64,7
Total	170	100

Q 9. Caregiver of the learner

Caregiver	N	%
Both parents	108	63,5
Mother	25	14,7
Father	1	0,6
Grandparents	11	6,5
Family	19	11
Guardian	4	2,4
Other	2	1,2
Total	170	100

The majority of learners (95,3%) have electricity at home. If they do not have electricity, it might affect reading behaviour at home. The absence of adequate lighting for quiet, sustained reading in some homes can hinder literacy development and voluntary reading.

Many learners listen to the radio (88,2%) and watch television (95,3%), even in informal settlements. Television viewing has been described in many studies as a reason why learners do not read. A study by Koolstra, Van der Voort and Van der Kamp (1997), using 1,050 Dutch primary school children, found a television-induced reduction in leisure-time book reading, and a television-induced depreciation of reading. The IEA study also found that television viewing occupies much of learners' time and that those who often watch television, tend to score at lower levels (Elley 1992: xiii). Unfortunately the learners in this study were not asked how much time they spend daily watching television.

Approximately a third (35,3%) of the respondents indicated that they have a computer at home.

Only 63,5% of the respondents stay with both parents. In many instances it is not the parents who are literacy role models for learners and who support their literacy development, but grandparents, other immediate and extended family members or caretakers. Socio-economic conditions may be the reason for learners to be cared for by a caregiver other than parents.

6.2.2.2. Questions 10 - 16: Literacy environment at home

Q 10. Home literacy

Literate caregivers	N	%
Yes	163	95,8
No	7	4,2
Total	170	100

Most of the learners (95,8%) indicated that their caregivers are literate. This figure could be misleading, as the child may assume that the caregiver can read or that a child does not want to admit that a caregiver is not literate. Respondents were not asked to indicate the level of literacy.

Q 11. Pre-school story reading

Pre-school reading	N	%
Yes	114	67,1
No	56	32,9
Total	170	100

Q 12. Storyreading

Storyreading	N	%
Yes	96	56,5
No	74	43,5
Total	170	100

Q. 13 Who reads to the child

Mother	67,8%
Father	33,3%
Grandparents	25%
Brothers/sisters	25%
Anyone else	10,4%

Questions 11-13

The important role that stories can play promoting voluntary reading was discussed in detail in Chapter 4.2.2. Pre-literacy experiences can prepare a child for later literacy development. In both the PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006, there was a positive relationship between learners' reading achievement and parents having engaged their

in early literacy activities before starting school (e.g. reading books and telling stories) (Mullis, *et al* 2007: 5). A third of the respondents replied “no” to pre-school story reading and 67,1% “yes:” This percentage drops when they go to school to 56,5%. Where stories are read (Question 13), the mother is the one who reads the most often to learners (67,8%), followed by the father (33,3%), grandparents and brother/sister equally (25%), and anyone else (10,4%). According to the National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans, English- and Afrikaans-speakers, those between the ages of 35-49, as well as coloured males and coloured females, are more likely to read to their children (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007).

Q 14. Books at home

Books at home	N	%
Yes	154	90,6
No	16	9,4
Total	170	100

Q 15. Number of books at home

This question was only answered by the 154 respondents that responded positively to Question 14

Number of books	N	%
Less than 10	55	35,7
11-50	57	37
More than 50	42	27,3
Total	154	100

Q 16. Types of reading materials at home

Children’s books	N	%
Yes	131	77
No	39	23
Total	170	100

Qur’an/Bible	N	%
Yes	152	89,4
No	18	10,6
Total	170	100

Adult's books	N	%
Yes	108	63,5
No	62	36,5
Total	170	100

Newspapers	N	%
Yes	127	74,7
No	43	25,3
Total	170	100

Magazines	N	%
Yes	146	85,8
No	24	14,2
Total	170	100

Questions 14-16:

The availability of books and reading materials is a key factor in the development of a reading habit and provides opportunities for learners to read. The positive effect of having books in the home is well documented and was discussed in Chapter 4.3. The IEA studies (Elley 1992: 65; Mullis, *et al* 2007: 110) showed a significant relationship between the number of books at home and learners' reading achievement levels.

According to the National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans, more than half of South Africa's households have no books (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007). Although 90,6% of the respondents have some kind of books at home and it seems that many learners have access to books at home, only 27,3% of the learners indicated that they have a substantial number of books at home (more than 50). Of the respondents 35,7% have less than 10 books in the home and 37% between 10 and 50 books, which is not many. They will have to rely on other sources such as the school or public library to obtain books to read. On average across countries in the PIRLS 2006 study, the majority of learners (57%) were from homes with more than 25 children's books and South Africa the majority of learners in homes with 10 or fewer children's books (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 112).

A literate home environment is a place where books, magazines, newspapers and other reading materials are readily available. More learners have access to magazines

(85,8%) than books. A large percentage (74,7%) of the respondents have newspapers in their home environment. The National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans found that in terms of reading material, newspapers emerge as the highest category, with magazines following suit (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007).

6.2.3 Questions 17-21: School environment

The literature survey clearly indicated the significance of certain factors in schools that contribute to the positive reading development of learners. This was discussed in Chapter 4.5. The questionnaires completed by teachers and headmasters give more data on the extent to which they are involved in learner's engagement in voluntary reading. These questionnaires also indicate how and if teachers and headmasters encourage learners to read.

6.2.3.1 Questions 17-18: School grade, and tuition language

Q 17. School grade

School grade	N	%
Grade 3	47	27,6
Grade 4	66	38,8
Grade 5	39	22,9
Grade 6	14	8,2
Grade 7	4	2,4
Total	170	100

The sample population – nine to 12 year olds – should be in Grades 3 - 7. They are in the reading Stage 3 (Chall 1983: 20 - 23). This is the middle/transitional reading phase and they should have mastered the basic reading skills. In this phase they become more fluent readers and become independent readers. The variation in grade level is often associated with variations in the starting age for school. The majority of respondents are in Grade 3 (27,6%), Grade 4 (38,8%) and Grade 5 (22,9%).

Q 18. Language of tuition and mother tongue

Tuition language different from mother tongue?	N	%
Yes	97	57
No	73	43
Total	170	100

From the literature study (Chapter 2.4) it was clear how important the relationship is between home language and tuition language is. Only 10% of the respondents indicated in Question 4 that English is their home language. Question 18 indicates that 57% of learners receive education in a second language – mainly English – and not in their home language. This could hinder reading and the development of voluntary reading. If one struggles to read in a certain language, reading for enjoyment is not likely. When learners are not proficient in the second language, it could be one of the reasons why they do not read. However, 43% of the respondents do receive tuition in their home language. An ANOVA analysis showed that among the 99 Black respondents, 83,9% indicated that they do not get tuition in their mother tongue.

6.2.3.2 Questions 19-21: Class reading

Q 19. Teacher reads in class

Story reading in class	N	%
Yes	160	94,1
No	10	5,9
Total	170	100

Q 20. Frequency of class reading

This question was only answered by the 160 respondents who responded positively to Question 20

Class reading	N	%
Every day	18	11,3
Once a week	105	65,6
Once in two weeks	25	15,6
Once a month	12	7,5
Total	160	100

Q 21. Read aloud in class

Read aloud	N	%
Yes	147	86,5
No	23	13,5
Total	170	100

The importance of stories and the role stories can play in the encouragement of voluntary reading was discussed in Chapter 4.2.2.

Reading to learners and reading aloud are valuable activities to encourage voluntary reading. Learners tend to imitate and when they see adults reading, or if they are read to by adults, they are more likely to want to read themselves. Most of the teachers do read to their learners (94,1%). The vast majority of respondents indicated that their teacher reads stories once a week (65,6%). In this regard the learners do get support from their school environment. See also Question 24 of the teachers' questionnaire.

As can be seen when comparing responses to Question 11 with Question 12, 67,1% of the respondents had stories read to them before they went to school, but once in school, this drops to 56,5%. This role is clearly then shifted to the teacher. It may also be assumed by parents that children are now old enough and sufficiently good readers to read to themselves.

The final section of the questionnaire (Questions 22 - 34) gives a picture of the learner's reading engagement and reading activities, as well as their access to libraries and reading materials.

6.2.4 Questions 22-23: Library environment

Q 22. Library membership

Library membership	N	%
Yes	110	64,7
No	60	35,3
Total	170	100

Q 23a. Type of library: Public library

Public library	N	%
Yes	75	68,2
No	35	31,8
Total	110	100

Q 23b. Type of library: School library

School library	N	%
Yes	61	55,5
No	49	44,5
Total	110	100

Library membership and frequent library visits are excellent opportunities to encourage children to read and to choose books for themselves.

The majority of learners (64,7%) are members of a library. Of the 110 respondents who are members of a library, more learners have access to a public/community library (68,2%) than to a school library (55,5%). This figure drops among respondents from disadvantaged communities, according to an ANOVA analysis, as 53,5% of them are members of a library and only 39% of a public or community library and 25% of a school library.

Half of all the learners said that they are members of a school library. Outcomes Based Education requires that learners have access to a wide range of materials. Many of the learners do not have a substantial number of books at home (See Question 15), but they do have access to a library. Research by Krashen (1998) found that children get a large percentage of books from a library. In this study the majority of learners use a library to some extent. This could be the case because the study was done in urban areas. Rural areas might not have the same results.

6.2.5 Questions 24 - 32: Learner's reading environment

Q 24. Books received as presents

Books as presents	N	%
Yes	100	58,8
No	70	41,2
Total	170	100

Books received as presents as well as a special place for children to keep their own library can send out a message that books are important. More than half the respondents (58,8%) have received a book as a present. In the Black race group, 47% have indicated they have received books as a present, but although 84,8% of this group said they have books in the home, almost a half (46,5%) indicated they have less than 10 books (Question 15).

Q 25. Encouragement to read

Encouragement to read	N	%
Yes	147	86,5
No	23	13,5
Total	170	100

Q 26. What learners read

What learners read	N	%
Books	160	94,1
Magazines, etc.	69	40,6

Q 27. Preferred language for reading

Language	N	%
Mother tongue	69	40,6
Other	101	59,4
Total	170	100

Q 28. Voluntary reading

Own reading	N	%
Never	5	2,9
Once a week	130	76,5
Once a month	35	20,6
Total	170	100

Q 29. Where learners read

Where learners read	N	%
At home	138	81,1
At school	138	81,1
Other places	51	30

Q 30. Reasons for reading

Reading reasons	N	%
Homework/school	128	75,3
Leisure/fun	108	63,5
Interest/information	108	63,5
Other	28	16,4

Q 31. Where learners get books to read

Get books from:	N	%
Buy books	98	57,6
Borrow books	46	27
School	121	71,1
Public library	70	41

Questions 25 - 31:

Most respondents (86,5%) of learners indicated that they get encouragement to read. The National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans found that parents who encourage their children to read, were more likely to be from the Western Cape and the Free State, English- or Afrikaans- speaking, and white females (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture, & Print Industries Cluster Council. 2007).

The majority of the respondents read books (94,1%), and 40,6% read magazines. Learners may read what is available.

Only 40.6% of respondents prefer to read in their mother tongue and 59,4% in another language. Of the respondents who do not have English or Afrikaans as mother tongue, 83,8% prefer to read in another language than their mother tongue (and 83,9% do not receive tuition in their mother tongue – See Question 18). This could be the result of so many learners not receiving tuition in their mother tongue.

Of the learners who indicated in Question 28 that they “never” read a book on their own, or only “once a month”, 62,5% (almost two-thirds) of them indicated in Question 18 that tuition is not in their mother tongue.

The vast majority of respondents – 76, 5% – indicated that they read on their own once a week, 20,6% once a month and 2,9% stated never. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that learners who read often, read well and that a positive correlation exists between the volume of reading and achievement levels (Elley 1992: 85). Repeated reading improves reading rate, enhances comprehension and helps readers feel more confident about their reading.

Reading is done equally at home and at school (81,1% each). Only 30% of the respondents indicated that they read at another place.

The literature study indicated that it is important that learners have opportunities to read for enjoyment, not only for school and educational purposes, in order to develop a reading habit. The majority of learners read for homework or school work (75,3%), and the same number (almost two thirds) read for leisure, and for information. In the PIRLS 2006, more South African learners reported reading for information than stories (literary reading) (Mullis, *et al* 2007: 149). This study also found that reading for information had a less clear-cut relationship with reading achievement than frequent literary reading.

Access to and availability of books and print material are important motivations to read. Most respondents (71,1%) get either school books or library books from school. The school thus appears to be the main source of books to read. In Question 23b 61% indicated that they are members of the school library. This means they also get books in the classroom and could refer to reading that they do as homework or additional voluntary reading, as well as reading they are required to do in class. Less than half (41%) use the public library to get books, although 68,2% said they are members of a public library (Question 23a).

Libraries are thus the second most used source. A relatively low percentage of respondents – 27% – borrow books to read. Learners in South Africa need more access and exposure to libraries.

Q 32. Reasons for not reading

Why not read	N	%
Too difficult	28	16,4
No books	40	23,5
Don't like reading	10	5,9
No time	32	18,8
Boring	25	14,7

The highest percentage (23,5%) – almost a quarter – of learners gave “no books” as the reason for not reading (See also Question 15). An ANOVA analysis among respondents from a disadvantaged background, revealed that more than a third (34,4%) gave “No books” as a reason for not reading. This is quite alarming and this issue needs to be addressed. If there is no access to reading materials, then reading cannot take place. Some of the respondents appear to have reading problems as 16,4% indicated “too difficult” as the reason for not reading. A possible cause for this may be the high percentage of learners who indicated they are not receiving tuition in their mother tongue and may find reading difficult for this reason. This issue was highlighted in research projects like the ADEA/UNESCO research in Sub-Saharan Africa (ADEA 2006). Some respondents (18,8%) indicated that they do not have enough time to read. In affluent homes reading has to compete with many extramural activities such as television watching and computer games. In less affluent homes children may be required to do chores before and after school and this diminishes the amount of free time available for reading.

6.3 TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Fifty teachers completed the teachers' questionnaire. (See Appendix B).

The questionnaire is divided as follows:

- Questions 1 - 5 are on background information,
- Questions 6 - 7 on the teachers' library environment,
- Questions 8 - 11 on teachers' own engagement in reading,
- Questions 12 - 16 on the school and teaching environment of the teachers,
- Questions 17 - 25 on the literacy environment of learners in their class,
- Questions 26 - 27 list activities to encourage learners' reading,

- Question 28 describes aspects of the home environment that could hinder learners' reading engagement according to the teachers, and
- Question 29 deals with any other comments by teachers.

6.3.1 Questions 1-5: Background information

These questions were included to obtain data on the teachers' gender, age, home language, teaching experience and teacher training.

Q 1. Gender

Gender	N	%
Male	3	6
Female	47	94
Total	50	100

Q 2. Age of teacher

Age	N	%
< 29 years	8	16
30 – 39 years	14	28
40 – 49 years	21	42
50 plus years	7	14
Total	50	100

Q 3. Home language

Home language	N	%
English	14	28
Afrikaans	17	34
Zulu	10	20
Tswana	0	0
Southern Sotho	2	4
Xhosa	1	2
Other	5	10
More than one	1	2
Total	50	100

Q 4. Teaching experience

Teaching experience	N	%
Less than one year	1	2
One to four years	7	14
Five to nine years	8	16

Ten or more years	34	68
Total	50	100

Q 5. Teacher training

Training	N	%
Pre primary	1	2
Junior primary	12	24
Senior primary	32	64
Junior secondary	1	2
Senior secondary	4	8
Total	50	100

Feminisation of education is clear, as 94% of the respondents are women. In the PIRLS 2006 study (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 200), internationally on average, 83 % of learners were taught by women, and 17% by men. This may have an influence on the role that teachers play in supporting learners to engage in reading. Boys may see reading as a female activity because in general mothers read to them (See Question 14 of the Learners' questionnaire) and then they have female teachers. As a result they may not have any male model.

Most of the respondents are in the age group 40 - 49 (42%), the second largest number (28%) 30 - 39 years, 16% younger than 29 and 14% older than 50 years. These results correspond with international trends. In the PIRLS 2006 (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 200), internationally on average, slightly less than half the learners (45%) were taught by teachers under the age of 40, and the remainder were taught by teachers 40 or older, and 15% of learners were taught by teachers under the age of 30. There may be a problem in coming years if teachers are not recruited.

Only 28% teachers have English as their home language. Teachers may not be competent in the language of tuition and this could affect the quality of teaching.

The majority of teachers who took part in the survey (68%) have more than 10 years teaching experience, 16% have 5 - 9 years experience, 14% 1 - 4 years and only 25% less than one year. This indicates that most of the teachers are experienced. The sample group of learners is in the junior and senior primary school phase and most of the teachers have training for these school grades (24% junior primary and 64%

senior primary). Most of the respondents are thus teaching at the level for which they are trained.

6.3.2 Questions 6-7: Teachers' library environment

Q 6. Library membership

Library members	N	%
Yes	20	40
No	30	60
Total	50	100

Q 7. Library usage

Library use	N	%
Once a week	10	20
Once a month	25	50
Never	15	30
Total	50	100

In this study only 40% indicated they are members of a library. Of these respondents who are members of a library, 50% use the library once a month, 20% once a week and 30% never.

6.3.3 Questions 8-11: Teachers' reading engagement

Q 8. Reading newspapers

Reading newspapers	N	%
Daily	23	46
Weekly	20	40
Once a month	6	12
Never	1	2
Total	50	100

Q 9. Magazine reading

Magazine reading	N	%
Once a week	23	46
Once a month	17	34
Never	10	20
Total	50	100

Q 10. Voluntary/leisure reading

Voluntary reading	N	%
Every day	14	28
Once a week	23	46
Once a month	9	18
Never	4	8
Total	50	100

Q 11. Work related/ information reading

Compulsory reading	N	%
Every day	20	40
Once a week	25	50
Once a month	5	10
Never	0	0
Total	50	100

Less than half of the teachers read a newspaper daily (46%), and the same number – 46% – indicated that they read a magazine once a month. Twenty-eight percent engage in voluntary reading on a daily basis and 44% read daily for work related purposes such as preparing for lessons, marking or professional reading.

6.3.4 Questions 12-16: School and teaching environment of teachers

This section included questions about characteristics of the class, classroom resources and activities for teaching reading.

Q 12. Number of children in class

Children per class	N	%
Less than 20	5	10
Between 20-29	8	16
Between 30-39	18	36
More than 40	19	38
Total	50	100

According to the latest statistics available the national average learner-to-educator ratio in South Africa is 32 (South Africa. Department of Education 2006: 6). In this study the majority of the respondents had more than 40 learners per class. In the PIRLS 2006 study, the average for South Africa was 42 (Mullin, *et al* 2007: 8). These

large classes make individual attention to learners very difficult. In the IEA study (Elley 1992: 48) it was found that countries whose teachers had smaller classes achieved better results in reading tests. Learners who do not read fluently are not likely to engage in voluntary reading. In such large classes a teacher will have little time to attend to learners with reading and learning difficulties.

Q 13. Tuition language

Tuition language	N	%
English	27	54
Afrikaans	18	36
Zulu	2	4
Southern Sotho	0	0
Tswana	0	0
Xhosa	0	0
Other	0	0
More than one	3	6
Total	50	100

In the IEA study (Elley 1992: 49) reported that countries which employ large numbers of teachers whose native language is different from that of the school do not produce as high literacy achievement levels in their learners as native language speaking teachers, regardless of economic conditions in the country. In question 3 only 28% of the teachers indicated that English is their home language, but for 54% the tuition language is English; 34% have Afrikaans as home language, but 36% teach in Afrikaans; 20% have Zulu as home language, but only 4% teach in Zulu. This also applies to the other languages. In Chapter 2.4 it was discussed how this could be a hurdle in language and reading development, especially if the teachers are not proficient in the tuition language.

Q 14. Meetings with parents

Parent meetings	N	%
Yes	30	60
No	20	40
Total	50	100

Q 15. Satisfactory homework

Homework satisfactory	N	%
Most	28	56
Some	19	38
Few	3	6
Total	50	100

Q 16. Parent interest in reading activities

Parent interest	N	%
Most	26	52
Some	21	42
None	3	6
Total	50	100

Questions 14-16

The importance of the relationship and partnership between home/parent and the school to foster reading was discussed in Chapter 4.4.

Meetings with parents are an important way of communication between home and school. Sixty percent of the respondents have meetings with parents.

Teacher satisfaction with learners' homework (56%), could also indicate that parents may be involved by checking homework and assignments and ensuring that it is done. However, teachers have varying standards regarding satisfaction with homework.

Teachers' rating of parents' interest in reading activities indicates the following: most (52%), some (42%) and none 6%. This is only just more than a half of the parents. Parents who are interested in learners' reading, show it is important and could create a positive attitude towards reading and motivate learners to read.

6.3.5 Questions 17-25: Literacy environment of learners

Questions 17 - 25 investigate the literacy environment of the learners in school and what support and encouragement learners get to read as well as their access to reading materials.

Q 17. Reading corner

Reading corner	N	%
Yes	28	56
No	22	44
Total	50	100

Q 18. Classroom collections

Classroom collections	N	%
Yes	36	72
No	14	28
Total	50	100

Q 19. Types of classroom collection

This question was only answered by the 36 respondents who gave a positive response to Question 18

Fiction	N	%
Yes	35	97
No	1	3
Total	36	100

Non-fiction	N	%
Yes	29	81
No	7	19
Total	36	100

Q 20. Number of books in classroom collection

The answers to this open question vary from 10 to 150. The average number of books in the classroom collections is 50. When one looks at Question 12 where the average number of learners per class is more than 40, this might not be sufficient. This will depend how often this collection is changed and if it is supplemented by the use of the library.

Q 21. Frequency of classroom collection use

Classroom collection use	N	%
Every day	12	33
Once a week	18	50
Once a month	5	14
Never	1	3
Total	36	100

Questions 17-21

A reading corner as well as a well-stocked classroom collection is an important part of the literacy environment. When books and other reading material are easily accessible, learners are much more likely to make use of them. The majority of learners (71,1%) indicated in Question 32 of the Learners' questionnaire that they get reading material from the school.

A classroom collection is very important if children do not have books at home, or access to the school or public library. In this survey, 72% respondents indicated they have a classroom collection and 56% a reading corner. Most collections have both fiction and non-fiction, but some only have fiction. Most teachers indicate that they use the classroom collection once a week (50%), followed by 33% every day, 14% once a month and 3% never.

Q 22. Frequency of story reading in class

Class story reading	N	%
Every day	5	10
Once a week	31	62
Once a month	12	24
Never	2	4
Total	50	100

Q 23. Learners read aloud in class

Read aloud in class	N	%
Every day	15	30
Once a week	26	52
Once a month	9	18
Never	0	0
Total	50	100

Q 24. Learners read silently in class

Read silently	N	%
Every day	15	30
Once a week	27	54
Once a month	4	8
Never	4	8
Total	50	100

Q 25. Remedial assistance for learners with reading difficulties

Remedial assistance	N	%
Yes	25	50
No	25	50
Total	50	100

Questions 22-25

Time spent reading in class is one way to show that reading is important. Ten percent indicated that they read stories every day, 62% once a week, 24% once a month. In the learners' questionnaire (Question 20) 65,6% learners also said that teachers read stories once a week. From the literature review (Chapter 4.5) it was clear how important reading aloud and sustained silent reading is to get learners involved and interested in reading. In most classes (52%) reading aloud is done once a week, 30% every day, 18% once a month. In the Questionnaire for learners (Question 21), 86,5% learners reported that they do read aloud in class. Thirty percent read silently every day and 54% once a week.

Remedial assistance is given to learners in only 50% cases. According to Howie (2007: 388), the majority of learners in South African schools do not have access to remedial assistance in reading. In the learners' questionnaire, almost a fifth of the respondents gave "too difficult" as a reason for not reading. Reading problems may be a reason for not reading.

6.3.6 Questions 26-27: Activities to encourage reading

Q. 26. Reading encouragement

Reading activities	N	%
Yes	44	88
No	6	12
Total	50	100

The majority of teachers (88%) have specific activities, both informal and formal, to encourage reading.

Q 27. Activities to encourage reading

Question 27 is an open question where these activities are listed. Content analysis was done to group these answers according to responses.

Most respondents have specific reading activities and activities around stories (81,8%), reading related activities (63,6%), followed by competitions, rewards and games (45%), library activities (29,5%), feedback by learners on reading (27%), exhibitions (15,9%) and drama activities (11%) to encourage reading.

- **Reading activities and activities around stories (81,8%)**

Most of the activities to encourage reading are specific reading done by teachers as well as learners.

- This includes silent reading and reading aloud, paired reading / peer reading (a weaker reader paired with good reader), children may read books from the book corner once they have completed their work, learners read articles in magazines and newspapers, learners read work written by other learners, learners are given books to read at home, learners read interesting parts from a book to the class, computerised reading programmes, reading a particular book and completing it, exchanging books amongst learners (Relay reading), prepared reading, the teacher reads in class to learners, the teacher reads interesting books like *Goosebumps* to learners and they get so interested that they borrow the book over the weekend to read, and the teacher reads half of story, children read rest.
- Activities around stories mentioned were storytelling, reading and acting stories in class, learners tell stories they've read, and completion of a story as learners think it could end.

- **Reading related activities (63,6%)**

Different reading related activities were described to encourage reading.

- Learners have to do reading for other school subjects and projects, for example find information to complete worksheets, assignments from newspapers or magazines for class work, looking for answers, oral

assignments from library books, rewrite of stories from readers and storybooks, crossword puzzles, e.g. in history, geography, English, making rhymes, and learners are encouraged to use the dictionary in class.

- Speeches – learners must read up for prepared, as well as unprepared speeches, and debate on certain topics from a reading book.
 - The teacher reads with learners with reading difficulties.
 - Flash / word cards, sight word activities, reading cards – cards with information and learners must try and get through as many cards as possible.
 - Tell/write/create a story around a picture. By using cards, pictures, different objects they must be creative, making their own stories by thinking while looking at pictures. Learners draw/paste a picture, make their own sentences and read them. “Picture story concept”: Picture cards and reading strips: Each picture has reading strips related to it, learners try to look at picture and match reading.
- **Competitions/Rewards/Games** are listed the third most frequently to encourage reading (45%).
 - **Competitions:** These are row-competitions where the winning row gets a reward, reading competitions, quiz on a reading passage, and an annual spellathon.
 - **Rewards:** Learners get a reward when they read, book prizes, learners get tokens for every book read and a prize for the one with the most tokens, Book Club awards for the number of books read each term/year and two main prizes, incentives after a book has been read to try encourage those who are not motivated in class, a card system with dots for books read, special books for a certain number of books read, and an incentive “bookworm list” to encourage reading at home.
 - **Games:** Book corner games with reading, educational toys and games involving reading, Word Bingo, Crosswords, and Word search games, and an annual Reading Festival.

- **Library activities (29,5%)**

In schools where there is a library,

- children to go to the school library to borrow books to read in school, as well as to take home;
 - library integration activities – formal during library time and during class activity time;
 - the teacher reads short pieces from books to children and if they want to know more they can borrow the books from the library – it's very effective to get the boys to read.
 - Learners are encouraged to visit the public library and teachers visit the public library with learners as an excursion.
- **Feedback by learners on reading** is another way to see that learners are reading (27%). This includes
 - book reviews by pupils,
 - book / reading reports after each storybook they've read,
 - summaries of books, and articles, reporting on something interesting that was read,
 - *Read and tell time* where they come and show books to the class and tell what they are about,
 - learners get bonus points when they introduce a book to the class,
 - learners introduce books by reading a short passage from the book,
 - learners have to complete questions / comprehension activities / tests on books read,
 - parents are requested to sign that child has read a book.
 - **Exhibitions (15,9%)**

Demonstrations of print can encourage reading. Respondents indicated they have exhibitions in class

 - on interesting subjects,
 - posters to encourage reading,
 - notices,
 - reading graphics,
 - a wall chart with reading statistics of the class,
 - and a reading tree with names of books in the leaves.

- **Drama activities (11%)**

- Acting stories in class,
- “Hooked on books” plays which dramatise certain books, or beginnings of stories that encourage the learners to read those books,
- acting out scenes from books or poems,
- dramatisation of a piece that was read,
- miming of a play or story.

6.3.7 Question 28: Aspects of the learner’s home environment that hinder the development of reading

Only three respondents did not have any comment on this question. Of the teachers who answered this open question, 89% regard issues around the parents themselves as a drawback for reading development, 44.7% resources and libraries, 32% gave other reasons (such as television or reading difficulties) and 23,4% the physical environment and socio-economic issues.

- **Parents (89%)**

The answers with “parents” as a problem in developing a reading habit, fall into four main categories:

- Lack of interest and non-involvement of parents (43%): Lack of interest, encouragement and motivation from parents, lack of involvement in child’s education, parents that believe the school is solely responsible for their child’s education, and indifference of parents.
- No reading habit themselves/lack of a reading culture (31%): Parents are not interested in reading, parents do not read to children or set an example of reading themselves, limited field of experience regarding reading, reading is not important to parents – do not take children to a library, do not buy magazines or other reading materials and children do not have the opportunity to read at home, and parents themselves were never exposed to a reading culture.

- Illiterate/ low literate parents (23,8%): Almost a quarter of the teachers see uneducated parents, parents or family members that have a problem with reading, and illiteracy or low literacy levels of parents as a stumbling block in the way of developing a reading habit in children. In Question 10 of the Learner's questionnaire, 95,8% of the learners indicated their parents or caregivers are able to read. As stated, this could indicate the child assumes that the caregiver can read or that a child does not want to admit that a caregiver may not be literate, and it did not indicate the level of literacy.
- Poor English of parents (7,1%): This applies to English medium schools (54 % of the respondents) with learners whose parents do not have English as their first language. Many parents cannot read English and thus cannot help the child when the tuition language is English. Question 19 of the Learner's questionnaire indicated that 57 % of the learners do not get tuition in their mother tongue.
- **Resources/Access/libraries (44,7%)**
 - Almost a half of the teachers see problems with resources and libraries as hindering reading development:
Access to and availability of resources: Insufficient resources nearby, no books within reach, lack of reading material – books, magazines, newspapers – at home, inadequate reading books, not enough books/ shortage of books at home, books (for leisure) are seldom found in the pupils' homes, little/no reading materials, parents do not ensure that children have reading materials.
 - Libraries: Lack of libraries in township areas, lack of libraries in schools, far from libraries, children do not visit the public library, children are not members of a library.
- **Other (32%)**
 - A large number of teachers mentioned television, videos and computer games as a reason why children do not read. Twelve of the 15 in this category had answers such as: It is less effort to watch television than to pick up a book and read, watch and listen television - too lazy too read, children just sit in front of the TV and are passive, they would rather watch TV than take books and read.

- Another problem identified is reading problems, with answers like: battle to read, reading difficulties.
 - Reading has to compete with extramural activities such as sport, and learners are more interested in other activities than reading.
- **Physical environment / Socio-economic issues (23,4%)**
 - A quarter of the teacher respondents mentioned the physical environment and socio-economic issues as hurdles in reading development, for example: No electricity (and water), infrastructure of informal settlements, lack of privacy in shacks, home conditions are poor, economic/social factors do not allow pupils to be library members.
 - Social background: Abusive home background, children are not staying with their parents, HIV/AIDS orphans, parents that work do not have time to assist their children.

6.3.8 Question 29: Other comments by teachers:

Q. 29. Comments

Twenty-two teachers had other comments on reading development and these are categorised under school environment, socio-economic issues and libraries.

- **School environment (68%)**
 - Large classes make it impossible to monitor whether children are actually reading or not;
 - learners in the 21st century must have access to modern technology like computer equipment and facilities;
 - more time in class should be set aside for reading;
 - more incentives/recognition for reading;
 - reading problems should be addressed;
 - reading standards in school are not what it should be;
 - inadequate textbooks (only the teacher has a textbook and has to compile notes for learners);
 - more books in the class for leisure reading;

- learners attend schools with English as tuition language without any knowledge of English.
- **Socio-economic issues (22,7%)**
 - Poverty, informal settlements, lack of electricity and unemployment are mentioned as critical issues.
 - Financial restraints – there is not enough money to supply classroom books or start a library.
- **Libraries (18%)**
 - Mobile libraries are needed where there are no public libraries;
 - public/community libraries should be established to give learners access to reading materials;
 - the Department of Education should assist schools without a school library to provide books and reading materials for class collections.

6.4 HEADMASTERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Twenty-two headmasters of primary schools were questioned. They were from the schools used in the survey. Refer to Appendix C for the headmaster's questionnaire.

The questionnaire is divided as follows:

- Questions 1 - 9 are on the school environment in general,
- Questions 10 - 21 on the school literacy environment,
- Questions 22 - 23 list activities to encourage reading and
- Question 24 deals with any other comments by the headmasters.

6.4.1 Questions 1-9: General school environment

Q.1. Name of school

Question 1 requested the name of the school (See Appendix I). Schools who participated are in the Highveld Ridge and Gauteng East areas.

Q 2. Type of school

Type of school	N	%
Private	3	14
Public	19	86
Total	22	100

Q 3. Number of learners in school***Q 4. Number of teachers in schools******Q 5. Average number of children per class***

School	Q3. Number of learners	Q4. Number of teachers	Q5. Average per class
School 1	750	30	32
School 2	617	22	32
School 3	849	18	47
School 4	120	11	12
School 5	1430	36	50
School 6	136	16	11
School 7	1060	28	38
School 8	585	23	35
School 9	784	31	34
School 10	830	29	29
School 11	1200	30	40
School 12	1500	35	58
School 13	720	24	30
School 14	1600	41	64
School 15	1200	33	45
School 16	350	20	20
School 17	700	30	32
School 18	595	20	35
School 19	880	35	33
School 20	743	22	40
School 21	405	14	32
School 22	656	16	43

The national average learner-to-school ratio in South Africa is 459 (in 2005), and for Gauteng 774 (South Africa. Department of Education 2006: 6). Nine of the schools in this study are above the national average, and 13 below the national average. Urban schools usually have a larger number of learners than rural schools. The average national learner-to-school ratio for private/independent schools is 309. The average number of learners in the private schools in this study is 202.

According to the latest statistics available the average learner-to-educator ratio in South Africa is 32.0 (South Africa. Department of Education 2006: 6). The average national learner-to-educator ratio at private schools in South Africa is 16.2, almost half the ratio for public schools. The learner-to-educator ratio of the private schools in this study (Schools 4, 6 and 16 above) is 14. In this study the learner-to-educator varies from 29 to 64 in public schools with an average of 39 learners per teacher. In the teacher's questionnaire, one of the problems identified that hinders reading, is that large classes make it impossible to monitor whether children are actually reading or not.

Q 6. Mother tongue of majority children in the school

Language	N	%
English	4	18
Afrikaans	8	36
Tswana	0	0
Southern Sotho	0	0
Zulu	6	27
Xhosa	1	5
Other	3	14
Total	22	100

Q 7. Tuition language of the school

Language	N	%
English	13	59
Afrikaans	7	32
Tswana	0	0
Southern Sotho	0	0
Zulu	0	0
Other	0	0
More than one	2	9
Total	22	100

Readers progress faster and become higher achievers in literacy if they know how to read in their first language (Bernhardt 2003: 114). Only 10% of the respondents are English mother tongue speakers (Question 4). The headmasters indicated that 18% of learners in their schools have English as their mother tongue, but in 59% of the schools in the study the tuition language is English. In Question 29 of the teachers' questionnaire, the issue of "learners attending schools with English as tuition

language without proficiency in English” is given as a reason for learners not reading. The language issue is thus a serious issue that could stand in the way of voluntary reading.

Q 8. Classroom shortages

Classroom shortages	N	%
Yes	11	50
No	11	50
Total	22	100

It seems that shortage of classrooms is a major problem in most schools. Fifty percent of the headmasters indicated that they have classroom shortages. If the physical environment is not favourable to reading, this could be an obstacle to voluntary reading.

Q 9. Regular general meetings with parents

Parent meetings	N	%
Yes	19	86
No	3	14
Total	22	100

The literature study showed how important contact and communication between the school and parents are (Chapter 4.4). The answers to Question 9 indicate that the schools surveyed do value this contact. Problems of the learner could be addressed, discussed and sorted out in this manner.

6.4.2 Questions 10 - 21: School literacy environment

The purpose of questions 10 - 21 is to investigate the existence of a school library and classroom collections. Availability of reading materials and access to it is one of the most important factors to get learners engaged in reading.

6.4.2.1 Questions 10-19: School library

Q 10. Does the school have a library?

School library	N	%
Yes	12	54,5
No	10	45,5
Total	22	100

From the literature review it was clear that a “yes” for a school library does not necessarily mean an active, functional library. Many libraries serve as a classroom for most of the day. In South Africa as a whole the percentage is 7,2% (South Africa. Department of Education 2007: 39), so the figure in this case study is fairly high. Thirteen of the 22 schools are former Model C or private schools and this could be the reason for this high percentage, as these schools traditionally had school libraries.

Q 11. Full time school librarian

School librarian	N	%
Yes	3	25
No	9	75
Total	12	100

Of the 12 schools with a school library 25% indicated a full time librarian. Most of the full-time school librarians are in private schools or former Model C schools that can afford to pay them out of School Governing Body funds.

Q 12. Part time school librarian

School librarian	N	%
Yes	9	75
No	3	25
Total	12	100

The majority of the 12 respondents with a school library – 75% – indicated a part time school librarian. Since the 1990s school librarians have been retrenched in large numbers or have been asked to step into full-time subject teaching (Zinn 2006: 30). The part-time school librarian is employed for only a few hours per week and is not

there all day to work with teachers and learners. This could diminish the role of the library in supporting voluntary reading.

Q 13. Qualified teacher librarian

Qualified librarian	N	%
Yes	4	33,3
No	8	66,7
Total	12	100

Q 14. Library orientation

Library orientation	N	%
Yes	8	66,7
No	4	33,3
Total	12	100

Q 15. Library use for leisure reading

Leisure reading	N	%
Yes	8	66,7
No	4	33,3
Total	12	100

Q 16. Library use for school projects

School projects	N	%
Yes	9	75
No	3	25
Total	12	100

Q 17. Number of books in the school library

Number of books	N	%
100-1000	3	25
1500-5000	5	41,7
7000-10500	4	33,3
Total	12	100

The number of books in the school library and the use thereof can be an indicator of how much the learners are exposed to reading material. In the IEA surveys (Elley 1992: 50; 66) a clear link was found between reading ability and the size of school libraries. The top ten countries have school libraries over twice as large as in the low-scoring ones. In this study a quarter of the respondents indicated less than 1000 books

in the school library. The average number of learners per school in this study was 805. That is not even one book per learner, which indicates a serious shortage of books. The number of books in the school library is thus inadequate for a successful reading programme. The IFLA/UNESCO school library guidelines (IFLA 2002), suggests that a school library should have at least 10 books for every learner in the school.

Q 18. Type of items in the school library

All 12 schools with a school library have fiction in their collections, 94% have non-fiction and 94% magazines, 70% have newspapers. The number of libraries with television and videos are 45%. Only 33% have computers, which is not much in a computerised 21st century.

Q 19. Annual budget for books and library materials

Annual budget	N	%
None	5	33,3
<R1000	3	20
R1000 – R10 000	5	33,3
>R10 000	2	13,4
Total	15	100

Book budgets in schools are increasingly under pressure. Only two schools indicated a budget of more than R10 000. A third has no budget at all. This is alarming. One of the responses to the open questions was: “Lack of finances proves to be the biggest stumbling block to having well-stocked libraries”. Research by Hurd, Dixon and Oldham (2006) found that higher book spending in the primary schools, which can be used to encourage independent reading, results in higher learner performance at the age of 11.

6.4.2.2 Question 20: Classroom collections

Any classroom collections	N	%
Yes	16	72,7
No	6	27,3
Total	22	100

The literature study showed that classroom collections can provide access to books and reading materials, especially when availability of books at home and access to a school library or public library is limited or non-existent. A fairly high percentage (72,7%) of the schools in this study, have classroom collections. Of the teachers interviewed, 72% have classroom collections (Question 18). Classroom collections were not defined, so only a few books could also be regarded as a classroom collection.

6.4.2.3 Question 21: Public/community library near school

Library nearby	N	%
Yes	17	77,3
No	5	22,7
Total	22	100

Most of the respondents – 77,3% – indicated that there is a public library within reach of the school. This study concentrated on urban areas. In the absence of school libraries, public libraries can fill a huge gap. However, many learners do not have transport to get to public libraries. Many learners make use of the public library after school, often just for a place to study.

6.4.3 Questions 22-23: Activities to encourage reading

Q 22. Activities to encourage reading

Reading encouragement	N	%
Yes	18	81,8
No	4	18,2
Total	22	100

Q 23. Specific activities to encourage reading in school

This is an open-ended question and 18 (81,8%) of the headmasters reported they have activities to encourage reading. Answers were grouped according to responses into three main activities: Special events/projects, reading activities and library involvement.

- **Special events/projects**

All 18 respondents who responded positively to the question on specific activities to encourage reading in their schools have special events or projects. This includes

- readathons,
- reading weeks,
- reading competitions or a quiz on books read,
- reading around special days like National Arbour Day, World Environment Day, World Book Day,
- media prefects introduce new books during assembly,
- merits and prizes on books that learners have read,
- school holidays programmes,
- research for assignments and projects,
- poem reading,
- and reporting and discussions on books or articles that learners have read.

- **Reading activities**

Specific reading activities were listed by 11 respondents (61%). These are

- voluntary reading sessions,
- peer reading where learners in a class who are good readers assist poor readers, as well as senior primary school learners assisting junior primary school learners,
- compulsory reading to do assignments in various subjects,
- learners are encouraged to read and parents get lists of the books read,
- learners get newspapers and magazines to read in their leisure time,
- class activities involving reading,
- reading on computers in a computer centre
- and language teachers using a reading list to encourage pupils to read.

- **Library activities/involvement**

Six of the respondents (33,3%) are involved in library activities to encourage reading, and these activities are

- media periods every second week and thus use of the media centre, displays in the library, an annual Library Week and Readathon week, promoting and

visiting the public library and extra copies of favourite storybooks in the library.

6.4.4 Question 24: Other comments by headmasters

Q 24. Comments

- The headmasters commented mainly on libraries: would like to have a well equipped library; would be happy to have a functional school library and have a full time librarian; the government should organise in-service-training for teachers in connection with library work; lack of finances proves to be the biggest stumbling block to having well-stocked libraries; co-operation with the public library – block loans per semester.
- One school expressed appreciation for the donation from Biblionef.
- One headmaster commented that the high rate of illiteracy among parents makes it difficult for parents to make any positive contribution to the learning of their children.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to get a broad picture of the literacy environment and voluntary reading of the learners sampled. This was achieved using the questionnaires described above. The findings will be discussed and analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports a summary of the findings of the study, conclusions reached after thorough investigation of the problem, and recommendations.

Concerns about existing reading practices and low literacy levels in South Africa led to this study. Literacy skills are acquired through multiple ways. The problem to be addressed in this study was if the literacy environment at home, in school and in the community support voluntary reading among middle primary school learners. This study investigated the literacy practices of a group of nine- to twelve-year-old learners. Although there are limitations to this study, one can come to some conclusions as to the support learners in urban and suburban areas studied receive to engage in voluntary reading and to develop a reading habit.

A review of the literature revealed that literacy is a competency needed to survive in the 21st century. Learners who lack reading competency will not be able to function effectively in modern society. Without the proper educational stimulation and encouragement from the home, the school and the community, availability of and access to reading materials, most learners will not engage in voluntary reading and develop a reading habit.

The research question to be answered was:

Does the literacy environment at home, in school and in the community support the development of literacy and voluntary reading among young learners?

- What factors in the environment support literacy and voluntary reading?
- To what extent is voluntary reading present in the sample group?

- What kind of literacy environment does the home provide?
- What kind of literacy environment do the schools provide?
- To what extent do learners have access to libraries?
- To what extent do they make use of libraries?
- Do they have access to reading materials?

Each of these questions will be discussed in this chapter.

7.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The overall findings show what factors in the environment are important to support literacy and voluntary reading, the engagement of the sample group in voluntary reading, the kind of literacy environment at home and school, and the learners' access to libraries, as well as reading materials.

In this case study the focus is on a group of learners in urban and suburban areas. Rural areas were not included and may have different results. The results in a case study cannot be generalised and this lack of generalisation is a limitation of this study.

Although the findings cannot be generalised, the results of the research may give some insight into children's engagement in voluntary reading and the support needed from the literacy environment, enabling teachers, parents and librarians to modify the environment where possible to create a more supportive literacy environment to encourage voluntary reading.

7.2.1 Home environment

The aim of this research was to find out what was being done in the home environment regarding literacy activities. The literature study indicated the importance of home environment in developing a reading habit. It was therefore important to investigate this aspect in the empirical survey.

With regards to home literacy, most of the learners indicated that their parents or caregivers are able to read. As stated, this could indicate the child assumes that the caregiver can read or that a child does not want to admit that a caregiver may not be literate, and it did not indicate the level of literacy. However, based on the respondents' replies, as well as the presence of newspapers and magazines in most homes (see section 6.2.2.2), it can be assumed that the majority of the parents and caregivers were literate. This indicates a higher level of adult literacy that is found in the general South African population (see section 1.1).

Language differences between the home environment and the tuition language seem to be a major problem in reading development of many learners. Many learners need to learn and study in a second language. Parents not competent in the second language are then unable or less able to help their children with school work. They will not be able to monitor homework, and communication with the school could be a problem, because they might not understand letters or newsletters from school.

The physical environment of the learners seems favourable, as most of them have electricity. If they did not have electricity, it could affect their reading behaviour at home. A third of the respondents have a computer at home. This survey was done in urban and suburban areas and rural areas could be less favourable in this regard.

Only two-thirds of the learners stay with both parents. The remaining third are in the care of one parent, other family members, or caregivers. This can have a negative effect because one-parent families are less likely to have the time to supervise homework, take children to the library or encourage them to read. It is also likely to affect the amount of discretionary income available for purchasing reading material such as books and magazines. Children being cared for by other family members or caregivers may have the same or similar problems.

Some learners indicated that stories had been read to them before school. This indicates parental involvement and literacy within the home. Once children went to school, this percentage dropped. It seems that parents/caregivers do not always realise how important reading stories can be even during the learner's early school years.

This is something teachers and principals could bring to their attention. The literature survey indicated the importance of story reading in promoting voluntary reading even after children have started school.

Literacy and voluntary reading cannot be promoted without accessible and interesting books and reading materials. The positive effect of having books in the home to encourage reading is well documented. A third of the respondents indicated that they have less than 10 books in the home, and just over a third have between 10 and 50 books. A quarter of the respondents said that “no books” is the reason why they do not read. Access to reading materials can thus be a reason why learners are not reading voluntarily. More learners have access to magazines than books. These may be adult magazines and not suitable for children. A large percentage (74,7%) of the respondents have newspapers in their home environment. This is higher than the national average, but could be the result among an urban population. A study by the University of South Africa’s Children’s Literature Research Unit, found that among Grade 5 - 7 learners, only a third responded positively that any newspapers are read at their home (Machet, Olën & Chamberlain 2001: 49). Newspapers are a sign of the community’s need to keep up of world events by means of reading and this reflects a social pressure to read (Elley 1992: 42). Magazines and newspapers in the home are significant in terms of voluntary reading, as this indicates a level of affluence in the surveyed population.

Most of the learners do get encouragement to read, but if they do not have opportunities or material to read, they will not be able to do so.

7.2.2 School environment

The literature study indicated how important the relationship between home language and tuition language is. Language barriers in the school environment seem to be a major problem in reading development of many learners. Responses to a series of questions in the learner’s, teacher’s and headmaster’s questionnaire show that a major issue is that the mother tongue differs from the tuition language. Various problems arise from this situation.

Many learners are taught and study in a second language. Only 10% of the learner respondents indicated that English is their home language but 57% learners receive education in a second language – mainly English – and not in their home language. This could hinder reading proficiency and the development of voluntary reading. If one is not sufficiently fluent in the language of tuition, then reading for enjoyment is not likely to take place, especially if reading material is in that language. Only 40,6% of respondents prefer to read in their mother tongue and 59,4% in another language. This could be the result of so many learners not receiving tuition in their mother tongue. They also may choose to read in another language because they feel it is important to be competent in that language (usually English). The unavailability of books in their home language could be a reason for not reading or not reading in their home language.

Language is not only an issue for many learners in school, but also for many teachers. Research indicates that countries which employ large numbers of teachers whose native language is different from that of the school do not produce as high literacy achievement levels in their learners as native language speaking teachers, regardless of economic conditions in the country (Elley 1992: 49). Only 28% of the teachers indicated that English is their home language, but for 54% the tuition language is English, 20% have Zulu as home language, but only 4% teach in Zulu. This could have a negative impact on language and reading development, especially if the teachers are not proficient in the tuition language.

Many teachers are not readers themselves. Some teachers indicated that they never read a newspaper, magazine, or engage in voluntary leisure reading.

Almost a quarter of the teachers see illiteracy or low literacy levels of parents as a stumbling block in the way of developing a reading habit in children. However, the high percentage of respondents in this study who have newspapers and magazines in their homes, indicates that the sample was relatively literate. The teachers were asked about learners and the literacy environment in their classrooms in general, and not the specific learners in the sample of this study, so this assumption could be founded. The

view of the teachers on parents' low literacy levels could be based on popular perceptions. It would be easier to blame external factors than to accept that they maybe they are not succeeding in motivating the learners to read.

The fact that 94 % of the teachers are female, may have an influence on the role that teachers play in supporting learners to engage in reading. Boys may see reading as a female activity. According to the responses in the learners' questionnaire, it is mainly mothers who read to them, and then they have female teachers. As a result, they may not have any male reading model.

In connection with the home-school partnership, the level of communication parents have with the school varies. Some parents have contact with their child's teacher; others have little contact. Teachers indicated that many parents are to some extent involved in their children's education and reading, but non-involvement of parents was the most common reason given as an aspect of the home environment that hinders the development of reading. This is the teachers' perception, but does not necessarily match what is happening. Teachers may blame the parents rather than take responsibility themselves for reading problems.

The importance of story reading in promoting voluntary reading was discussed in detail in the literature survey. A large number of learners indicated that their teachers do read to them in class and that they get opportunities in class to read. In this regard the learners do get support from their teachers to engage in reading activities.

Fifty percent of the headmasters indicated that they have classroom shortages. If the physical environment is not favourable, this could impact on reading activities.

Large classes were also identified as a problem in many schools. The majority of the respondents had more than 40 learners per class. In general, the higher the learner-to-educator ratio, the less contact an educator will have with a learner during the learning and teaching process, which could hinder literacy learning. The IEA study (Elley 1992: 48) showed that better reading results were achieved with more favourable learner-teacher ratios in a school. These large classes make individual attention to

learners, especially those experiencing reading problems, very difficult. Remedial assistance is given to learners in only 50% cases. In the learners' questionnaire, almost a fifth of the respondents gave "too difficult" as a reason for not reading. Reading difficulties may be thus a reason for not reading.

In this survey half of the schools indicated they have a school library which is much higher than the national average of 7,2%. Half of the schools in the survey are former Model C or private schools and this corresponds with a survey that found that of these schools "50% have libraries ... They are well equipped, have adequate annual budgets and are staffed by full-time librarians" (Hart & Zinn 2007: 93). However, financial support for books, reading materials and libraries in schools is insufficient. Many schools are under-resourced and not all schools are funded to the same degree. A third of the schools have no annual budget for library books at all, and a fifth less than R1000. Only two schools have a budget of more than R10 000. In this study a quarter of the respondents indicated less than 1000 books in the school library. The average number of learners per school in this study was 805. That is about one book per learner, which indicates a serious shortage of books. The number of books in the school library is thus inadequate for a successful reading programme. The IFLA/UNESCO school library guidelines (IFLA 2002), suggests that a school library should have at least 10 books for every learner in the school. Only 25% of schools in this study have a full time school librarian.

Although 72% of both the learners and teachers indicated that they have "classroom collections", they are not defined, and it is difficult to know how extensive these are and whether they are changed regularly if they are small. The average number of books in the classroom collections is 50 and the average number of learners per class is more than 40. This might then not be sufficient. Most of the learners indicated the school is their main source to get books to read, but it seems that the schools cannot provide them with a variety of reading materials.

In the open questions, a large number of teachers listed activities to encourage reading. Most of them have specific reading activities and activities around stories, (for example specific reading done by teachers as well as learners), reading related

activities, competitions, rewards and games, school library activities, feedback by learners on their reading, exhibitions, and drama activities. Headmasters also reported activities to encourage reading, such as special events and projects, specific reading activities, and school library activities.

The teachers saw the following issues as obstacles in reading development: issues with the parents, such as low literacy, language barriers, and non-involvement, the lack of resources and libraries, the physical environment, socio-economic issues and other reasons, such as television, and reading difficulties. They also mentioned that the school environment in general is often not favourable, for example inadequate text books, and low reading standards.

In general, it seems that the schools included in the survey face numerous challenges to create a better literate environment to support the development of voluntary reading.

7.2.3 Public libraries and community support

Learners develop reading behaviours and attitudes at home, as well as reading skills in school. However, the experiences that learners have at school and home are often affected by the cultural, social and economic factors in the community.

From the literature review it is clear how important it is that public libraries have outreach activities so that both parents and learners can realise the value of books, the library and its services. A majority of the population have not grown up with libraries and have no recognition of what libraries are, what they offer and what the benefits of being a member are.

Of the learner respondents 35,7% have less than 10 books in the home and 37% between 10 and 50 books, which is not many. They will have to rely on other sources such as the school or public library to obtain books to read. There is still a disparity between library provision in different areas and environments in South Africa. This is an issue that needs to be addressed seriously. Almost a quarter of the learner

respondents indicated that “no books” was the reason why they do not read. An ANOVA analysis showed that almost half of the learners who are not members of a school or public library, gave “no books” as a reason for not reading.

Learners as well as teachers interviewed indicated use of the library, but in both cases a third does not use the library at all. This is disappointing, as the schools were in urban areas, so public libraries are usually accessible. In a country like South Africa where literacy levels are low, and school libraries either non-existent or largely not functional, public and community libraries could play a much bigger role in providing reading materials to develop a reading habit and to promote voluntary reading. There could also be greater cooperation between the schools and public libraries.

7.3 CONCLUSIONS

South Africa has a high number of adults with low levels of literacy. In order to prevent this situation being perpetuated, it is essential to address the issue of developing a culture of reading as early as possible. The key to getting learners involved in reading lies in helping them to see literacy as an enjoyable and valued part of their lives. It is necessary for children to have positive feelings about reading and to be motivated to read if they are to become voluntary readers. The challenge is much bigger than teaching learners to read, because it is not literacy alone that creates a reading habit. Approaches to fostering positive attitudes toward reading must be developed and used at all ages, because reading programmes that only rely on extrinsic motivation do not necessarily lead to positive attitudes about reading. Voluntary reading will develop only when a learner can read competently and chooses to read.

Literacy and voluntary reading cannot be promoted without books, reading materials and libraries. It is not a single practice that will promote literacy, but it is exposure to a wide range of literacy practices integrated in a meaningful way into daily activities that encourages reading.

In a country like South Africa where many children have little access to books and many need to learn in a second or third language the challenge to create a reading habit is enormous and real differences can be made.

In conclusion, the main problems identified in the population sample used in this study in developing voluntary reading are:

- Multilingualism, with the majority of learners being taught from an early age in a second language rather than their mother tongue.
- Teachers who do not teach in their mother tongue and are not so competent in the language of tuition themselves;
- Low literacy levels of parents and caregivers, which limits their ability to help learners with school work;
- Parents and caregivers lack of fluency in the language of tuition, which hinders their ability to help their children with homework;
- Many parents, caregivers and teachers do not have a reading habit themselves and are thus not role models for the learners;
- Socio-economic conditions which are not conducive to developing a reading habit, such as lack of discretionary income to buy books and other reading material;
- Availability of and access to reading materials and books for voluntary reading;
- The uneven provision of school libraries limits access to a large number of learners;
- Lack of effective libraries at school and in communities, or access to libraries;
- Insufficient financial support for books, reading materials and school libraries from government.

In South Africa many schools are in disadvantaged communities and there is a big divide between them and schools in advantaged communities. This difference is apparent in the former Model C and private schools in this study, and schools in township areas.

In order to develop a reading habit in South Africa, these matters will have to be addressed seriously.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to get learners engaged in voluntary reading, many role players on various levels should be involved: from learners themselves, to parents, community leaders, teachers, school principals, service providers like publishers and bookstores, role players on provincial, as well as national level. Each one can contribute to creating a favourable literacy environment. If more homes, classrooms and schools encourage and support voluntary reading, the literacy levels of the country will increase.

The following recommendations are made:

- Increase parental involvement to address literacy problems in South Africa. Ideally parents need to be involved in their children's education to be effective, and in their reading activities for it to develop.
- Establish more family literacy programmes to raise literacy awareness and literacy levels in the literacy environment at home;
- Address pre-literacy skills development;
- Market and promote books and reading: More national and local literacy awareness campaigns – like Readathon – to make the public more aware of the importance of reading;
- Increase learners' access to literacy resources at home, at school, and in the community;
- Increase community involvement in encouraging reading;
- Establish collaborative efforts by parents or caregivers, teachers and librarians to promote literacy development;
- Establish more public libraries in disadvantaged areas;
- Increase financial support to existing public libraries to ensure professional service and adequate resources;
- Encourage public libraries to reach out to their communities by organising outreach activities.

- Increase support for school libraries to ensure they function effectively;
- Train and appoint teacher librarians;
- Train teachers specially to teach literacy;
- Address the issue of mother tongue education for at least the first five or six years. Research has clearly indicated that more than the present first three years of mother tongue education is needed to advance reading achievement.

7.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following research problems that need investigation have been identified:

- Computerised reading programmes need to be investigated to see whether they can be used as a supplemental resource for reading development.
- The possibility of cooperation between schools and public libraries cooperate to address the issue of resources for learners needs to be investigated.
- What role can classroom collections play in making reading materials available where there is a lack of other sources?
- The study needs to be replicated in rural areas or a study on a representative sample needs to be carried out.

7.6 IN CONCLUSION

Reading for pleasure offers numerous benefits and encouraging a love of reading and motivation to read is a desirable goal. It is therefore important that parents, teachers and librarians are aware of the factors that may influence learners' voluntary reading activities at home or at school.

It is not a single practice that will promote literacy, but it is exposure to a wide range of literacy practices, integrated in a meaningful way into daily activities, that encourages reading. It is clear that home, school, and community literacy environments are important elements in fostering the development of a reading habit. This study showed that the development of a reading habit is not the sole concern of

teachers and the school, but the wider community should be involved in encouraging and supporting voluntary reading: parents, caregivers, childminders, librarians and various role players in the community. All these have important roles to play in further developing our understanding of what literacy and a reading habit mean. Connections among the home, school and community should be made to support children in their literacy learning and increase their motivation to read.

The general conclusion arrived at from this study, is that a significant number of learners are experiencing access and other problems which prevent them for engaging in voluntary reading. Although the study cannot be generalised across the whole population, it can be assumed that for large parts of South Africa the findings would apply. If anything, because the survey indicated that the respondents were more privileged than the average South African child, the problems would be greater.

The factors that promote a reading habit should be nurtured and those that hinder the development of voluntary reading understood and avoided. The findings and recommendations of this study are submitted with the hope that they may contribute towards creating favourable conditions for voluntary reading among learners in South Africa.

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Appendix A

Learners' questionnaire

Appendix B

Teachers' questionnaire

Appendix C

Headmasters' questionnaire

Appendix D

Information sheet – Parents

PARENTS' INFORMATION SHEET

LITERACY ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY READING

We are conducting a study to find out how the literacy environment at home, at school and in the community can support a child to develop reading skills and a reading habit.

A culture of reading is missing among the majority of the population. A reading habit should be inculcated in the individual at a tender age. If learners can read and write efficiently, they are more likely to be successful learners.

Children learn from what is going on around them. The social environment of the child – the home, school and community – is a determining factor in the child's development. To overcome environmental obstacles to reading and to establish a reading habit requires a partnership of all the agents involved – a concerted effort of parents, the school and the community.

Education in South Africa faces an enormous challenge to address low literacy levels, high repeater rates and high failure rates. Literacy is the heart of education. Every child needs a solid foundation in basic literacy skills. Curriculum 2005 identifies the effective handling of information as one of the eight critical outcomes of education, and "Communication, literacy and language learning" forms an important learning area of Curriculum 2005. Children must not only be taught how to read, but also to read.

What the child will have to do in this study:

- Answer questions about himself/herself, the home and family;
- Answer questions about his/her teacher and school;
- Answer questions about his/her reading activities;
- Someone will ask the questions and they will just give an answer;
- No name will appear on the questionnaire and all information will be treated as confidential.

Appendix E

Information sheet – Learners

CHILD'S INFORMATION SHEET

LITERACY ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY READING

We are conducting a study to find out how your environment – parents/family, home, school, community – support you to read.

What will you have to do in this study?

- Answer questions about yourself, your family and your home.
- Answer questions about your teacher and your school.
- Answer questions about your reading activities.
- Someone will ask you the questions and you must answer them honestly.
- Your name will not appear on the questionnaire and all information will be treated as confidential.



Appendix F

Letter of consent – Learners

CHILD'S INFORMED CONSENT

LITERACY ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY READING

I,
agree to participate in this study conducted by Leone Tiemensma to
investigate if my literacy environment supports my reading at home
and at school.

The research has been explained to me and I understand that I will be
expected to answer questions about:

- Myself, my home and my family;
- My teacher and my school;
- My reading activities.

I understand my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to
withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice.

Child.....

Interviewer.....

date.....

Appendix G

List of participating schools

1. Benoni Junior
2. Buyani Primary School
3. Chloorkop Primary School
4. Dolo Ed
5. eMbalenhle Primary School
6. Highveld Muslim School
7. Kempton Park Primary School
8. Laerskool Goedehoop
9. Laerskool Impala
10. Laerskool Kempton Park
11. Laerskool Kommando
12. Laerskool Kruinpark
13. Laerskool Oranjegloed
14. Laerskool Secunda
15. Lehlabile
16. Lifaletu Primary School
17. Mahlasedi-Masana Primary School
18. Rosefern Primary School
19. Rynfield Primary School
20. Shapeve Primar School
21. TP Stratten Primary School
22. Volksskool Brakpan